

Writing the self for reconciliation and global citizenship: The inner dialogue and creative voices for cultural healing

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The purpose of a writer is to keep civilization from destroying itself. – Albert Camus

Introduction

Educators increasingly speak about the need for global citizenship while recognizing the challenges teachers and students face in developing it (Davies, 2006). Research also reveals hurdles to culturally inclusive education (Artiles, Kozleski, & Waitoller, 2011) and the importance of cultivating cultural competence (Archambault, 2015; Lowenstein, 2009) while we face abiding colonialist influences in our curricula (Kanu, 2006). Schellhammer, in a related vein, speaks of the issues of “otherness” surrounding the refugee situation in Germany and the inner “Umwendung” or turnaround this requires. We propose that cultural tensions must be genuinely addressed to realize our educational and democratic ideals and yet this requires different learning processes than hitherto offered in most educational contexts.

We might say that we are caught in a variety of false identifications, in I-positions that are in fact I-prisons: narratives that entrap, confuse, and restrict people literally and symbolically (Hermans, 2017). These narrative identifications, from which there are no easy escapes, are akin to “cognitive identity frames” which are “constructions, in each person’s mind, of the different categories that constitute the evolving identity offer of the society he or she belongs to . . . mainly social stereotypes” (Guichard, 2009, p. 253). These frames or identifications, however, are not merely cognitive in nature; they are

deeply anchored within cultural consciousness where our identities have been shaped since childhood in emotion-laden processes involving dynamics of *shame* and *esteem* (Stuart, 1998). That is why it is naïve to think that cultural competencies can be learned in reproductive learning processes where information is provided about difference and diversity and discussions do not unearth unconscious identifications.

In this chapter, we propose that the democracy we wish to see out in the world is influenced by the quality of our own “inner democracies”—that is: the quality of the democracies among and between the selves or voices in the landscape of the self. We must find ways out of the I-prisons we experience and perpetuate. With this in mind, we propose that “writing the self,” a method whereby creative, expressive, and reflective writing is used to cultivate an internal dialogue and construct a new identity narrative (Lengelle, 2014), can assist in reshaping our stories about “the Other and ourselves” and can contribute to personal and cultural healing and reconciliation. The inner dialogue reconciled is foundational for the external dialogue at the heart of global citizenship within education. Indeed, as Schellhammer argues, we must cultivate the self in order to become inter-culturally competent, and this includes facing shadow aspects through truthful dialogues with the self and caring for the self.

The Dialogical Self

In this context, the *dialogical self theory* (DST) assists us in understanding the nature of “self” as an inner democracy of voices and positions that can be at once at peace and in conflict with themselves (Hermans, Konopka, Oosterwegel, & Zomer, 2017). DST also describes how the “external positions” of the world in which we were

and are socialized and which formed our identities have become *internalized* selves and sometimes become I-prisons. The work of writing the self is about allowing the contradictions and the conflicting inner voices to be heard and talk to one another in a felt way (Lengelle, 2016). This becomes a starting point for more democratic internal and external dialogues in terms of creating “third positions” (Hermans et al., 2017) or the “Third Space” (Bhabha, 1990), where “hybridity and globalization are closely allied . . . [and] different local cultures are combined and recombined to create hybrid identities” (Hermans et al., 2017).

The focus here on the *internal* dialogue is deliberate and underscores this under-represented facet of (identity) development in educational contexts. Knowledge production and transfer in education are still focused primarily on reproductive learning and not individual meaning-making; education is still largely monological (Meijers, 2013) and teachers’ identities and entrenched routines are still primarily aimed at knowledge transfer (den Boer & Hoeve, 2017).

Our context

To show how “writing the self” contributes to the process of reconciliation with the self and subsequently between cultures (e.g., Indigenous peoples and the dominant culture of colonization), we will explore the Canadian context in which we as authors all live. Importantly, we propose that what we learn for ourselves by examining a specific intention of reconciliation in Canada can have broader implications for education globally.

We begin with a description of the current Government of Canada's aims to foster reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples¹ in the light of a history where oppression, discrimination, and violence against the First Peoples of Canada was and is rampant and often hidden. We will describe *writing the self* as a process of dialogical development and illustrate this with two stories of self-healing that address different aspects of reconciliation. These stories are told by two of the chapter authors and the source materials from graduate projects using writing the self as method (Lengelle & Meijers, 2014).

The Canadian context

In the *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* created in 1996, all Canadians were urged to begin a process of reconciliation that was intended to set the country on a bold new path, in hopes of fundamentally changing Canada's relationship with Aboriginal peoples. Yet the findings of *The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* show that

much of what the Royal Commission had to say has been ignored by government;
a majority of its recommendations were never implemented. But the report and its

¹ A Note on Terminology

Language can be political, complex, and ever changing. Globally, there are many different terms to describe the original inhabitants or "First Peoples" of various countries. The United Nations uses the term "Indigenous peoples." We have used "Aboriginal" as the all-encompassing adjective for the First Peoples of Canada, but for stylistic variety, we have also used variations of "First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI)" and "Indigenous." As authors, we have diverse cultural backgrounds but grew up using terms such as "Indian" and "Native," which may still be used in historic and government documents but have fallen out of general use and are considered outdated by many. For an excellent glossary of appropriate terminology related to Aboriginal Peoples of Canada, please refer to the National Aboriginal Health Organization's guidelines available at www.naho/publications/topics/terminology. For a broader discussion of the complexities and evolution of appropriate terminology, see Lisa Monchalin's (2016a) introduction in *The Colonial Problem*, listed in the *References* section.

findings opened people's eyes and changed the conversation about the reality for Aboriginal people in [Canada]. (Truth and Reconciliation Commission [TRC] of Canada, 2015, p. 7)

In September 2007, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the 46 articles of the *United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)*.

Canada was originally involved in the creation of the text of UNDRIP. . . . Indeed, this declaration received almost universal backing from the international community. Four countries, however—Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand—initially refused to sign it. These countries all later changed their positions and have now endorsed the declaration. (Monchalin, 2016a, p. 292)

Endorsement, though, does not guarantee swift and immediate action; in reality, bridge-building is a slow and laborious process. Established in 2008, the TRC was mandated to document the history and on-going legacy of the church-run residential schools and to initiate a formal process of healing through reconciliation (TRC, 2015, p. 23). The principles outlined in *UNDRIP* were foundational to the work of the TRC, which released its final report and 94 calls to action in June 2015. Later that year, newly elected Prime Minister Justin Trudeau promised the Assembly of First Nations Special Chiefs Assembly that his government would take action and implement UNDRIP (Monchalin, 2016a, p. 292).

The need to act is essential and statistics confirm that there is indeed much work to do to address the social, economic, and academic inequities in Canada. With regards to school dropout rates, "Indigenous students living in First Nations communities have a completion rate of 49 per cent . . . it is statistically more likely that students from First

Nations communities will go to jail than graduate from high school” (Monchalin, 2016a, p. 160). Poverty affects 51% of First Nations youth—even 60% of those living on reserves—compared to only 18% of all of Canada's population (Macdonald & Wilson, 2016). An Ontario study found that 33% of First Nations youth report that their homes are “difficult” (Health Canada, 2003). As well, 30-40% of children living in out-of-home care in Canada are Aboriginal, yet Aboriginal children represent less than 5% of children in the country (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2012).

Children from First Nations backgrounds are also five to six times more likely than non-First Nations to commit suicide, a number that has been increasing (Health Canada, 2003). Similarly, "suicide rates for Inuit are among the highest in the world, at 11 times the national average, and for young Inuit men the rates are 28 times higher" (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2012). First Nations youth are 2.5 times more likely to be victims of physical or sexual violence (Scrim, 2016) and 25-50% of Aboriginal women reported sexual abuse as children, compared to 20-25% of non-Aboriginal women (Scrim, 2016). Drugs and alcohol abuse are a problem: one out of five admit to using solvents (Chansonneuve, 2007). Teen pregnancy rates are also high among First Nations, with 21-26% of First Nations children having parents between the ages of 15-24, compared to 8% of non-Aboriginal children (Chansonneuve, 2007; Government of Canada, 2016). First Nations people are also over-represented in incarceration, with an incarceration rate of 64.5 per 10,000, compared to only 8.2 per 10,000 for non-First Nations (Chansonneuve, 2007).

To help facilitate the reconciliation process, the TRC report makes 94 recommendations, calling for change at all levels, from personal action to national action

and initiatives. Within academic institutions, there is much discussion about incorporating Indigenous perspectives and histories into all levels of public education. However, as we argue here, providing the factual histories and listening to the stories of others is only a starting point for true reconciliation and a cultural shift—“personal action” must include an inner shift. Indeed, the report closes with the following thoughts on the personal path to reconciliation: “Thinking must change. The way we talk to, and about, each other must change. All Canadians must make a firm and lasting commitment to reconciliation to ensure that Canada is a country where our children and grandchildren can thrive” (TRC, 2015, p. 317).

Methodology: “Writing the self”

“Writing the self” refers to the work of using creative, expressive, and reflective forms of writing to work on identity formation: the process of going from a first (i.e., destructive, distressing, victim-laden) to second (i.e., life-giving) story through a process of engaging with feelings and progressing through the cognitive steps of sensing, sifting, focusing, and understanding (for an elaboration see Lengelle & Meijers, 2009; Meijers & Lengelle, 2012). In dialogical self theory terms, it is making use of a variety of writing exercises in order to express I-positions (i.e., what is important to me), and to broaden and deepen I-positions (i.e., when/how this is important and in what other situations is it important), in order to eventually develop meta (i.e., permitting overview of positions and their relationships) and promoter positions (i.e., organizing and giving direction to other positions) (Lengelle, 2016). The development of meta and promoter positions ultimately makes leaving I-prisons possible.

Lengelle developed this method of writing for personal development and facilitates graduate courses at Athabasca University in Canada for the Master of Arts—Integrated Studies (MAIS) program and elsewhere. Students work in online semester-based groups or individually to write their life stories as well as become familiar with the various applications of therapeutic writing in additional contexts, such as hospital arts programs, prison writing projects, and expressive writing groups to heal trauma (Pennebaker, 2011). The writing-the-self program is structured in a way in which students explore personal and professional struggles through journal writing, fiction, poetry, and inquiry in the process of developing new stories of meaning and identity. Important in the process is a safe environment in which to do such deep work and the presence of a skilled facilitator (for a full explanation, see Lengelle & Ashby, 2016).

The stories

It occurred to us that self-healing was necessary from both Aboriginal and-non-Aboriginal perspectives, as both groups have been sutured into narratives that [insert] us into discourses that appear to give our lives coherence, wholeness, and meaning, but in the process, they also wound us and break us, separate and alienate us, pacify us, and expose us to losses so severe that we can easily cease to be. (Anderson, Holt, & McGady, 2000, p. 61)

The first story is by Charity who is a First Nations woman and teacher. She writes of the “rejected” parts of herself as an Aboriginal woman. The second story by Charlene, a college advisor who refers to herself as “a white chick living on Treaty 6 land,” speaks of her desire to be of use to at-risk Indigenous students. Both these women re-story their

lives on a personal level and make conscious use of writing in order to make sense of experience and construct their identities, both personally and professionally.

Charity's story

Adapted from Jardine (2016a, 2016b), Reimagining our Curriculum: Making Room for the First Nations Voice in Literature and Writing and Personal Development: Using the Pen to Heal the First Nations Self

In October 2015, I became aware of a sudden health dysfunction: I was having trouble swallowing food and liquid. I had to grip the table with each attempt to swallow. Over the next two months, it only got worse: eventually I could barely swallow at all. By Christmas break I was unable to leave the house. A visit to my doctor indicated that there was nothing physically wrong, but I was frustrated, scared, and driven to seek help from various sources. Through writing and counselling, I began to investigate my inner dialogue to help me process the fear of what was happening to me. It wasn't a pleasant discovery.

In my reality I was inferior because of my Native background. To belong to that race meant you were poor, ugly, drunk, fat, unhealthy, abused, addicted, and likely a failure. I was convinced that the only measures to success and happiness were to get married to someone non-Native, get a higher education, and buy lots of things. I also thought being a “mainstream professional” woman would help me become respectable. Decades passed without my addressing the insecurities I felt and what was at the root of them. My internal dialogue often ran to self-hate: “I am always miserable; I am not fun enough for anyone to want to spend time with me; I have to work harder to be perfect

because I am Native and a woman.” My marriage was full of tension as well and although I became a successful school teacher after graduating from university, I struggled to cope with depression and anxiety on a daily basis and suffered multiple breakdowns.

Using activities such as proprioceptive writing (Trichter-Metcalf & Simon, 2002) and a written inquiry technique called “The Work” (Katie, 2002) in a graduate course called “Writing the Self” (Lengelle, 2003), I began to explore my personal narrative in a way that has freed me of many fears about it. I started to rummage through old thoughts, as I rummage through my clothes in regular closet purges. Writing can provide the means through which we detach ourselves from outmoded identities: we write, we read it over, and we also become an observer (i.e., in DST terms, we develop meta-positions) with the ability to see the bigger picture. Through what Allen (2000) calls a “redemptive power” of writing, these events become a part of the self that can be rationally discussed and accepted (p. 260). We can use the pen to actively take control of our healing (i.e., develop a promoter position).

In my own first story, I was ashamed of my Native heritage, troubled over family dysfunction, and despised other Native people while being completely insecure about my own gifts and struggles. My story was causing suffering and I was trapped (i.e., in an I-prison). I felt I wouldn't be able to handle the strong emotions related to abuse and domestic violence I had suffered, out of fear of another breakdown or more severe panic attacks. Throughout the writing process I found that I did not have to overwhelm myself further with upsetting, negative images, but that I could sift through my thoughts, memories, and impressions as they naturally presented themselves.

The steps in the writing process begin with sensing what we are feeling, thinking, and remembering as we sift through events by selecting and comparing. A variety of conflicting I-positions appear on the page at this stage. For example, I thought my life had to look a certain way. I rejected qualities of myself and events of my past that didn't fit the image and identity I desired. The focus then shifts from such lived experiences to understanding the big picture of how events and beliefs about those events have led to a given conclusion (i.e., a story). We are then able to move toward constructing a second story for ourselves with a "shift in perspective, acceptance, or meaning found/constructed" (Lengelle & Meijers, 2009, p. 59). This process can be repeated as often as a person finds that their narrative feels like a first story again.

Recently I participated in a Blanket Exercise held in my community as a part of the *Every Child Matters* initiative with close to forty others (KAIROS Canada, 2013). A Blanket Exercise is an interactive learning session where participants take on the various roles of the Aboriginal person within the history of the 500-year Canadian-Indigenous relationship through pre-contact, treaty-making, colonization, and resistance (KAIROS Canada, 2013). Afterward, we sat in a big circle and shared our thoughts, and each of us had difficulty speaking through the emotions. When it was my turn, I talked about how my own lateral racism resulted in shame, and when I shared how my mental health failed, I broke down. It felt good to let people of my community know that I had been "wrong," that at times I felt weak and had suffered. For so long I felt I had to put up a façade of having a great life as an example of one of us who "made it." I have greater insight on the immense burden of pain placed upon my race that will affect my beliefs from now on.

For my examination of using "writing the self" approaches in the Aboriginal

classroom, I began by researching First Nations' realities through statistics from Health Canada (see above). I also reflected on my own educational experience. In my youth I was a "perfect student," having mastered the ability to perform as my teachers wanted. In my undergrad years, I rarely had an opportunity for personal writing. I was allowed to share my opinion and to provide evidence for it or reproduce others' thoughts. It would be awkward to read these papers again, as though they belonged to another person. Even my early graduate-level papers lacked a personal presence that showed that I was merely putting on another persona; one that didn't reflect my personal journey as a human being. In my early academic days when my thinking felt restricted to reproducing what others did and thought, my inner voice was silenced, and maybe I felt it was not valuable. After a year of using writing to explore my past, I can honestly say that my writing not only flows more easily, but it also feels more like me.

From my research on First Nations people, I concluded that the heartbreaking social issues of suicide, violence, and drug abuse are directly related to *loss of identity* through the effects of colonization (de la Sablonierre et al., 2011). Also, it is clear that education cannot create real cultural change if it remains focused on repressive, reproductive learning. As my own experience taught me, youth experience confusion about their identities and are offered few ways to heal that confusion. *I* felt I didn't belong with the confident, glamorous white people I saw because we were brown and came from the bush. I didn't belong with my Native peers who spoke lively Cree and engaged in more daring and fun activities, while I was a quiet bookworm and teacher's pet. I definitely distanced myself from the broken Natives I saw around town: drunk, grubby, and shameful. In dialogical terms I see that for my people some I-positions likely say "I-

as proud to be First Nations,” while others say “I-as worthless, shameful, addicted, imperfect, abused.” This latter internalized narrative (i.e., an I-prison), which mostly supposes failure on the part of Native people from the “voice” of the dominant culture of Canada, cannot be reconciled with the human desire to be found worthy. In more poignant language, *a narrative that cannot be reconciled on a personal level is per definition a story that cannot contribute to reconciliation.*

In my analysis of the situation and the proposed approach, I drew four conclusions that should be considered when incorporating creative, expressive, and reflective writing in education for the purpose of cultural healing. These also have implications for curriculum development and education in a broader sense. First, at the heart of First Nations’ problems is the loss of identity evident in the diminishment of cultural practice, traditional stories, and the loss of language (Fontaine, 2012). For example, I smothered my aboriginality at every opportunity and accepted stereotypes of my own people. I did everything I could to distance myself from what I was and the literature and TV programming I grew up with was focused on the stories of white people with racist depictions of “Indians.” We need to heal these damaging and traumatic stories that are both implied and perpetuated, and painfully embedded within the people themselves.

Second, traditional stories are deeply associated with *place*. This is the fundamental way First Nations people “position” themselves—both literally and symbolically. Traditional Aboriginal stories have been labeled as primitive and childish by western scholars (Petrone, 1990); however, they were created to promote attachments between a person and their surroundings—to provide a literal and symbolic grounding

from which to see and act. They represent guidelines for living, not only for everyday and religious beliefs but also in influencing behaviour and providing a foundation for ethical behaviour (Basso, 1996).

Third, there is no opportunity to return to purely “traditional ways,” so the way in which to connect to traditional stories must be developed. For this, I borrow the West African Akan concept of “Sankofa”: returning to one’s cultural past in order to move forward. By doing so we “have to reconcile the best in the wisdom of our ancestors—the best of our tradition—with the changing realities of the present” (Kanu, 2006, p. 203). The stories of the past can help build the stories of the future, but the challenge lies in fostering connections between students and the stories. We must introduce youth to traditional stories in relevant ways so as to help them understand and shape present realities. They can then contribute to the transformation of powerful stories of pain and suffering into healing and personal development.

We can best combine the past/present and the western/Aboriginal in a “Third” or “Hybrid Space” (Bhabha, 1990), “where heterogeneous lifestyles and practices coexist with homogenizing scenarios of everyday life both at the centre and at the margins” (Kanu, 2006, p. 214). This is similar to the notion of *third position* (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010) where “two different, contradicting, or conflicting I-positions are combined or reconciled” (Hermans et al., 2017). This third position is also the way out of a so-called I-prison, where contradictory and destructive definitions of identity have made escape impossible.

Finally, in order to create new approaches in education, it should be acknowledged that although storytelling in First Nations cultures was an oral tradition,

First Nations artists are increasingly sharing stories within the Canadian context through written work. Both published narratives as well as oral stories told in the community can become springboards in the classroom for creative, expressive, and reflective writing by students. The cultural relevance and creative engagement with such stories will make it possible to shape hybrid identities that work and re-story damaging narratives.

In conclusion, I realize that by gaining a better sense of the world within me, I rejoined the world around me and began to heal the trauma of the past which had led to painful stories about my identity. I notice now that I can swallow with equanimity.

Charlene's story

Adapted from Bonnar (2016), Âsokan —“Bridge”: Building the Bridge of Reconciliation, One Story at a Time

As a college advisor, I work each year with dozens of Indigenous students who come to college in pursuit of “higher learning,” and each year, I watch them fall like leaves from a tree in autumn. The retention rates for Aboriginal students are abysmal, and I can think of only a handful with whom I have worked over the past thirteen years who have graduated from college or university. According to Statistics Canada, only 9.8% of those reporting Indigenous identity on the National Household survey questionnaire of 2011 had a university degree compared with 26.5% of non-Indigenous Canadians (Monchalin, 2016a, p. 160); this is a substantial gap. The lack of educated First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI) professionals contributes to the ongoing disparities in education. It is, indeed, a vicious cycle but one from which we can emerge.

Working in an educational environment, I am cognizant of the fact that I am a member of an institution and bureaucracy that is not culturally sensitive in its offerings, procedures, and environment. I operate within the colonial constraints of a traditional post-secondary institution in a predominantly Euro-Canadian community; therefore, I am seen as the “Other” by Indigenous students while they are seen as the “Other” by the mainstream college community. Because of the colonial foundation on which we tread, the divide persists. The generation of students with whom I work did not attend residential school; however, the fallout of the experiences of their parents and grandparents is passed on to them in the form of intergenerational trauma (Elias et al., 2012). To establish trust, we need to build bridges of cultural understanding and engagement between Euro-Canadian institutions and all students.

Obviously, systemic barriers exist for Aboriginal students that are beyond my control; however, as a member of and a college advisor in this bureaucracy, I ask myself, “What can I do?” I believe the response lies, at least in part, in questioning internalized colonial assumptions that would allow me to build more meaningful connections between Indigenous students and the predominantly white colonial institutions in which we attempt to educate one another. How do we build that *âsokan*, the bridge of which my Cree friends speak?

In order to begin, I must question the deeply ingrained and assumed realities about Indigenous peoples that stem from the cultural stereotypes with which I grew up and the colonial education I received. As a white woman raised on Treaty 6 land,² I

² Treaty 6 is an agreement signed on August 23, 1876, covering 50 First Nations across Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, which made provisions for the right to education and self-determination of First Nations people.

struggle to reconcile the teachings of my 1970s-80s colonial public school education with the reality in which I find myself in the new millennium. In dialogical terms, I-as-white was the dominant cultural I-position I grew up with and I-as-culturally-aware-of-the-Other was a position in need of development and articulation. As part of the self-reflective process, I engaged in an autoethnographic process of re-storying (for full details, see Bonnar, 2016). The research method of autoethnography and “re-storying” is culturally appropriate because storytelling is an essential part of learning and teaching in many Aboriginal cultures, and as one of my mentors reminds me, in the oral tradition, we learn indirectly through the telling and re-telling of stories. As a member of the dominant culture, I have the opportunity to give voice to the assumptions of the colonizers and try to undo them in myself, thereby creating possible solutions based on new conceptions. However, in order to achieve this, I needed to examine and write my first story, which I soon learned was a story with colonial and racist undercurrents.

I did not know it at the time, but I lived most of my childhood in a colonial empire on the Canadian prairies. An elementary school class photo captures the whiteness of my childhood: tousled blonde bangs and pigtails, freckles, fair skin. I knew nothing else. I didn’t see it at the time, but my classmates all looked the same. I was oblivious to “the Other.”

Images of the “noble savage” and other caricatures appeared in movies, songs, and Social Studies textbooks: the Lone Ranger and Tonto; the red chief and his daughter Tiger Lily in Disney’s *Peter Pan*; “one little, two little, three little Indians”; and the stern and stoic, cross-armed, barely clad man with long braids, a feather, and a tomahawk—entire nations and cultures reduced to stereotypes.

“Indians” were always there but rarely in direct view; they were instead on the periphery of my white world on the Canadian prairies. At the lake each summer, the white families occupied the majority of the sandy beach while the “Native kids” stayed at the far end where the playground equipment was rusty and the water was weedy. That’s just how it was. We never talked to one another and never played together; however, as I watched them from the corner of my eye, I am sure that they were cautiously watching me as well. As innocent children, we may not have been able to articulate it, but we were “the Other” to one another. Dialogically speaking, the I-prison here is fortified in both literal and symbolic ways. The “fictional” portrayals of “the Other” along with the actual segregation make it impossible to “know the Other.” One might call the stereotypical, fictional images “I-phantoms” that cannot be checked against reality.

Parents and teachers were not overtly racist. And yet, I was afraid. I was afraid because everyone and everything I knew about “Natives” separated us—we were so different that there was no possible way that we could ever be connected and, therefore, we must remain segregated.

Those fears and beliefs stayed with me into adulthood. I did not realize it at the time, but what I needed to do as a college advisor was to challenge my “concepts and identities . . . to feel, observe, converse about and reflect on those experiences” that had shaped me and co-construct my identity, reframe my experiences, and learn to navigate the world of my work more responsibly (Meijers & Lengelle, 2012, p. 16). My professional role involved serving Aboriginal students, and yet I had to examine the story with which I had grown up and rewrite it to fit the reality of the people I was encountering in my adult life. In order to do that, I researched Aboriginal cultures and

learned about residential schools. I was astonished by the history that surrounded my hometown and no longer saw the land around me as the Saskatchewan prairies but instead as Treaty 6 land, a place grounded in rich culture with a history full of holes and populated by people I truly did not know.

Those people included Jarita Naistus, a college student who was murdered in 2005 and is now one of thousands of Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women in Canada. Jarita's death served as a catalyst for me not to wait to try to make a difference in the lives of young people. The reality of her death ignited my desire to connect. It prompted me to take much-needed action at the college. The TRC final report challenges Canadians to

learn how to practice reconciliation in our everyday lives—within ourselves and our families, and in our communities, governments, places of worship, schools, and workplaces. To do so constructively, Canadians must remain committed to the ongoing work of establishing and maintaining respectful relationships. (TRC, 2015, p. 21)

Personally and professionally, I have allowed myself to be culturally vulnerable and have committed to practice reconciliation. Of course, along the way my motives have been questioned and my will has been tested. At times, I have wondered why I—as a self-proclaimed “stupid white chick”—have continued to push the cultural boundaries. My answer came when I met Wes Fineday, a traditional knowledge keeper from Sweetgrass First Nation in Saskatchewan. I learned from Wes that I am not breaking down walls. I am building bridges.

Wes enjoys traditional oral storytelling and ties it to activities such as medicine picking or tipi building. I have learned from Wes to sit back and listen—truly listen—to the tale in order to glean from it what I need to know and remember. I have also learned that there is rarely a precise answer to a direct question and those lessons come indirectly through stories. Wes has inspired me to become an active participant in the reconciliation—or “bridge building”—process. His perspectives and sharing have allowed me to develop the position “I-as-knowing-the-Other” and to leave the I-prison of my youth. The internal and external dialogues combine here to offer new (self) insights (i.e., meta positions) and an ability to engage differently with my students and colleagues (i.e., promoter position).

The power of storytelling brought me full circle, so we can build the cultural bridge—*âsokan*—together. By writing for my personal development and uncovering the stereotypes with which I identified, I became vulnerable and this vulnerability is precisely what is needed to engage in intercultural discussions.

Discussion

Through the TRC’s initial efforts, a non-Aboriginal woman summed up the powerful experience of listening to residential school survivors tell their stories as follows: “By listening to your story, my story can change. By listening to your story, I can change” (TRC, 2015, p. 21). However, as this chapter shows, this intention must be expanded to include the awareness that *by listening and becoming aware of the (unquestioned) story in me about myself and about you, my story—and my actions—can change*. We must become aware of both our own I-positions and I-prisons, and in this

way become open enough to allow the dialogue that will make it possible for us to understand the I-positions and I-prisons of the other. Reconciled stories within the self are at the heart of reconciliation and, as we can see here, meaning-oriented learning processes are required. As an author and witness to the stories of residential school survivors, Wab Kinew (2015) says,

Reconciliation is not something realized on a grand level, something that happens when a prime minister and national chief shake hands. It takes place at a much more individual level. Reconciliation is realized when two people come together and understand that what they share unites them and that what is different about them needs to be respected. (p. 211)

Conclusion

The stories told here show two particular dimensions of the cultural and individual healing that are required in order to work towards the educational goals described. The colonized must see where she/he has been “sutured” into the narrative of inferiority and shame—a story that, as Charity describes, cannot and should not be “swallowed.” And the one bred to be the colonizer must see how she/he has been “sutured” into the assumptions of dominance and guilt. The way out of such I-prisons is through deeply felt self-understanding, thus realizing we have been shaped by fearful stories that have taken root in our selves. Such stories must be uncovered and questioned in order for a bridge between conflicting selves and conflicting others to be constructed.

In this process, we do not discard cultures nor do we appropriate them; instead we create “third positions” (e.g., I-as-an educator within a post-modern globalizing world

where dominant discourses must be questioned on an ongoing basis). This means that students and teachers alike must not merely hear about the Other (i.e., through fact-based reproductive learning), but teachers and those designing and developing education must cultivate their dialogicality. The powerful act of writing one's own story could be undertaken by teachers and leaders first. We propose politicians, school leaders, and educators would be more able to support reconciliation if they had to first explore their own stories of exile and marginalization and examined their unquestioned beliefs about the Other. Also, in joint efforts to foster change, people should work together (in physical proximity) on collaborative projects and then engage in vulnerable conversations about those experiences. Personal writing, as a way of stimulating the internal dialogue, helps pave the way for these dialogues as argued in detail in this chapter.

We also propose curriculum that loosens itself from its Euro-centric grip and lessens the great divide between the curriculum and the First Nations child by acknowledging the beauty and vitality of one's own culture and language. Curriculum and pedagogical methods should also incorporate learning approaches that work better for First Nations people, which research shows includes, "listening to, observing, and taking part in family and community activities" (Ball & Lewis, 2005, p. 4). Research shows that effective learning situations should therefore include strategies such as "peer interaction, slower talk with more pauses, sharing information back and forth, and storytelling" (Ball & Lewis, 2005, p.4).

We end with a metaphor Charlene's friend Wes, the traditional knowledge keeper, used as a living example of what is possible between people and cultures: "You are a white horse. I am a brown horse. We can still pull a cart together." Our message is

that his metaphor applies not only to interactions between people, but in the internal selves that are in conflict with one another as well. The harnesses on two horses, brown and white, can either be a painful prison—a tug of war—or become a good framework for working together, moving forward, and authoring new deeply-felt understandings as we cross the bridge of cultural healing together.

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