BRAIDED LEARNING

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INTRODUCTION

Indigenous Presence

"We can do a project about Indigenous people," the teacher said. "What would you like to do?"

"I want to make a book about my community for the teachers and kids in this school because they don't know a thing about us," nine-year-old Tamara responded. "They think we live in tipis down that road."[1]

I tell and retell this story with purpose. It reminds me that Indigenous children and youth are aware of what people know and don't know about our histories, cultures, and worldviews. They are bothered by this lack of knowledge and want to do something about it. Ultimately, this book is for them. However, the change that Tamara and others like her are hoping to accomplish requires engagement. More specifically, then, this book is for those who want to engage, hear, and learn from Indigenous voices telling Indigenous stories. It is about the relationship between Indigenous Peoples and settler Canadians and the ways in which colonialism informs our relationship. Illustrating Indigenous humanity, ongoing presence, and worldviews through art and story, each chapter addresses Indigenous Peoples' survival, ongoing presence, and future visions.

Although Tamara could not articulate it, she was responding to a reality that was purposefully created. Until the early twenty-first century, in countries around the world, stories about Indigenous Peoples positioned us as Romantic, Mythical, primitive people of the

past.[2] Sami, Maori, Cree, Inuit, Mapuche, Maasai – many people share this experience. Stories and images of us are used to produce and reproduce ways of knowing that keep us locked in the past. Dominant representations of Indigenous Peoples justify the theft of our lands and resources to generate the wealth of nation-states established on our lands, erasing our existence. In settler states, including Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand, the attempted eradication of Indigenous Peoples included policies aimed at genocide. In other places, including South America, Scandinavia, and Southeast Asia, to achieve eradication, Indigenous Peoples were almost completely absorbed into the colonizing population, or wholly isolated. Yet while these policies and practices had and continue to have devastating impacts, Indigenous Peoples survive and flourish. We continue to resist and are working to re-establish our ways of living, taking care of each other and the land. Our work includes teaching others that we did not disappear. Our ways of knowing and being are legitimate, and we continue to thrive. We have always known, and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples affirms and protects, our collective and individual rights, including our right to cultural practices, control of our economies, and leadership in social and political institutions.

In the current context, particularly in Canada, there is a growing interest in understanding and learning from Indigenous Peoples. This turning toward recognition of our ongoing presence has not occurred in isolation: it comes from the efforts of Indigenous leaders, activists, artists, and educators who have vigorously and unstintingly worked for needed change. Seeking to recover from the violence of colonialism, to gain access to ancestral teachings, and to recuperate Indigenous languages and worldviews, students, families, and communities advocate for the inclusion of Indigenous education in schools and sites of public education, including art galleries, historic sites, and museums, and through film and media. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action both crystallize and amplify Indigenous Peoples' demands for recognition of our ongoing presence,

concrete improvements in our access to and control of land and resources, and the right to self-determination.[3]

In part, this book is written in response to the Listening Stone Project: Learning from the Indigenous Education–Focused Collaborative Inquiry Initiative. As the principal researcher on this four-year project, I worked alongside Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators and community members from across Ontario. Presenting on the research brought me into conversations with local, national, and international audiences. The research focused on improving Indigenous student well-being and achievement. Findings emphasized the ongoing need for knowledge and understanding of settler colonialism and its impacts. When asked about their biggest challenge, consistently 90 to 94 percent of educators over the course of the project identified their lack of knowledge and understanding of Indigenous people's history and culture and their fear of making a mistake when teaching.[4] Whether I was talking with high school students in northern Ontario, teacher candidates in Vancouver, school board trustees in Toronto, or teacher educators at conferences in Chicago or Washington, DC, I heard the same message: *We do not know the history. Even if we want to support Indigenous people, we do not know where to start. We are afraid of doing it wrong.* As part of the research, I interviewed and surveyed close to four hundred educators, and their concerns were consistent with the broader field of research addressing Indigenous education in institutions of public schooling. Among educators, lack of knowledge is well documented.[5] Godlewska, Moore, and Bednasek refer to it as "cultivated ignorance or an ignorance that has been taught, learned, and embedded in the curriculum."[6] In this book, I am responding to what is, for me, an alarming lack of knowledge and understanding of Indigenous Peoples, our experiences, and our perspectives.

Settler Colonialism and Education

Anti-colonialism and anti-Indigenous racism call for settlers to understand the complexities of whiteness and settlement. Settler colonialism

occurs when colonizers come to stay and form their own governing systems, eliminating the already existing nations.[7] Indigenous Peoples are pushed aside to build settler states on expropriated land. Veracini aptly identifies this as the "colonizers' demand that Indigenous populations 'go away' whether through literal/physical death or through figurative/social forms of death through assimilation or absorption into the settler polity."[8] White supremacy plays a vital role in settler colonialism, as it relies on the assumption that whiteness and white ways of being are superior to Indigenous Peoples' ways of being and are therefore to be desired. It requires the Indigenous population to want to and be forced to assimilate into the settler population.

Colonialism is a structure and a process that operates at all levels in our education systems, including the hierarchical organization of schools, the competitive approach to schooling, the content of the curriculum, how curriculum is taught, and who is doing the teaching. The shortage of self-identified Indigenous teachers in schools across Canada is well known to those working in the field. For example, in Alberta, where the Indigenous student population is 7 percent, Indigenous teachers make up less than 1 percent of the teaching population.[9] The under-representation of Indigenous people in the teaching profession impacts all students. Not surprisingly, it is Indigenous students who identify it as significant.[10]

The most significant manifestation of colonialism in our schools is the near complete erasure of Indigenous Peoples, our experiences, and our perspectives. This erasure is both material (physical presence) and ideological (knowledge). Canada is a settler colonial nation-state – Indigenous land and people were colonized by the French and British, and colonization continues through government policies and practices. Settler teachers have limited knowledge of the history of Indigenous–non-Indigenous relations and treaty and traditional rights, or the current issues impacting our communities, including the loss of land, resource extraction, and imposed governing systems. This entrenched ignorance in mainstream or settler-stream education is a critical issue for all Canadians.[11] Schools are colonial institutions, and

teachers – like all Canadians – are impacted by what they did and did not learn in schools.

My commitment to the project of decolonizing schools is both personal and professional. I am an Indigenous educator (Potawatomi/Lenape/Irish/French) and strongly agree with Senator Murray Sinclair, who said about the Indian residential school system, "Education got us into this mess, and education will get us out of this mess – the use of education at least in terms of residential schools – but education is the key to reconciliation."[12] After thirty years of work in the field of Indigenous education, I know that this is complicated. In many ways, what Indigenous people want and need Canadians to learn is what many Canadians do not want to know. Like other Indigenous educators, I am somewhat weary of the need to educate non-Indigenous people. However, as Tamara's experience, described in the first paragraphs of this introduction, demonstrates, Indigenous people live in a relationship with non-Indigenous people. If we want new, better, more equitable and just relationships, all Canadians need a better understanding of the history that informs our relationship.

Afro-Indigenous Solidarity

I argue strongly that if you live on Indigenous land, you are in a relationship with Indigenous people. Just as strongly, I believe that how you came to live on this land matters a great deal. Not everyone or everyone's ancestors arrived by the same routes, nor did they experience the same privileges when they arrived. As important as it is to recognize diversity within the Indigenous population, it is equally important to recognize diversity within the settler population.

Settler colonialism and the attempted genocide of Indigenous Peoples did not happen in isolation. The theft of Indigenous lands occurred alongside the enslavement and forced movement of Africans. The violence and oppression experienced by Black and Indigenous people connects us with each other. Our experiences are different and the same. From the time the first Africans were forcibly brought to our

land, we have had experiences of solidarity and conflict. There are stories of care and protection, as well as stories of violence and discrimination perpetrated against each other. Increased knowledge and understanding of how white supremacy and settler colonialism have been used against us, and used to position us against each other, is contributing to increased commitments to Afro-Indigenous solidarity.

Black and Indigenous people are becoming increasingly committed to working together, developing deep alliances, and supporting each other's work to dismantle white supremacy. A move toward establishing deep alliances is evident in the stories of Elders watching over young people during the Black Lives Matter protests, doing their work as protectors, and stories of Black activists bringing food to protesters and travelling to protest alongside their Indigenous brothers and sisters during the Idle No More, Wet'suwet'en, and LANDBACK protests.

Deep alliance requires deep commitment to supporting each other, refusing to compete with each other over who is more oppressed, refusing to keep our interactions at a surface level through public expressions of support or appreciation. It involves working together and learning from each other's knowledges and experiences.

These alliances are making it increasingly possible to recognize and hear the voices of Afro-Indigenous people. Identified primarily on the basis of visible markers of their Blackness, their identities as Indigenous people have historically been silenced or erased. In learning about the experiences of Indigenous people, it is absolutely critical to hear a diversity of voices. My intention in this book is to encourage the recognition and significance of difference, prioritizing respectful relationships. Rather than judging each other's worthiness, it is possible to learn from and with difference.

Our Perspectives

I have been working in the field of Indigenous education for over three decades, and I have spent considerable time thinking about

questions of representation. I am particularly interested in what non-Indigenous people hear and learn from the stories Indigenous people tell. I am writing this book in collaboration with my brother Michael Dion. We grew up with our four siblings, basking in the warmth of our parents' love for each other. The shadow of colonialism eclipsed that warmth. While our father shared stories of his childhood, stories of an Irish-Catholic family leaving home and arriving in Quebec City, our mother was almost silent about her childhood experiences growing up on Moraviantown Reserve Number 47. My strongest memory from when I finally found a way to talk with our mother about her life was her sense of insult. Her words stay with me: "They judged us incapable, as if we did not know how to take care of ourselves and our children." The disdain she expressed toward those who judged reflected a deep sense of pride in her own and her family's capacities to take care of themselves and each other.

Michael and I began writing together in the early 1990s. At the time, I was an elementary school teacher and Michael was working in downtown Toronto restaurants. We had many conversations about being Indigenous and what it was like growing up in a small southern Ontario city, living with anti-Indigenous racism that was not, at that time, even identified as racism. I shared with Michael my experiences as a teacher, including the time I was assisting one of my English as a Second Language students in her history class and heard the teacher say, in reference to the building of the railroad across the western plains, "It was no problem – there was nothing out there but some buffalo and a few hundred Indians." When I told Michael about my children – his nieces and nephew – coming home with images of Indians dressed in buckskin and feathers, we started to discuss the idea of writing about Indigenous people. We wanted to share our stories, to provide readers with opportunities to learn, from our perspective, what it means to be an Indigenous person in Canada. The words of that history teacher still sting, and I know he was not the only one. His words are emblematic of teachers' lack of knowledge and, consequently, students' lack of learning opportunities.

Why Art and Story?

In his book *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*, Daniel Heath Justice writes, "Story makes meaning of the relationships that define who we are and what our place is in the world; it reminds us of our duties, our rights and responsibilities and the consequences and transformative possibilities of our actions."[13] In my teaching and research encounters, I have come to know that many Canadians are unfamiliar with Indigenous literature. At the start of each academic year, I ask students in my university classes if they have ever read a book by an Indigenous author. Students report that while they have all read Shakespeare, many have read Hemingway, and some have read Margaret Atwood, very few have read a book written by an Indigenous author. More than once I have heard, "I didn't even know that Indigenous people write books." Heath Justice echoes Indigenous storytellers – King, Momaday, Archibald, Vizenor – who, informed by centuries-old storytelling tradition, recognize the centrality of story for making meaning of our lives.[14] Heeding their words, my brother and I are sharing our stories with intention. We agree that the stories we hear and do not hear – the stories we tell and do not tell, about ourselves and each other – matter a great deal.

My faith in the power of story comes from my experience and my understanding of the use of stories as teaching and learning tools within Indigenous cultures. Sitting around the supper table after the plates were cleared, around the campfire, or waiting for the clothes to dry at the laundromat, my parents told stories. Some of the stories were about fond memories, difficult times, or loved ones. Mom's stories were usually about the exciting and amusing events of the day. I appreciated listening to the stories as much as my parents enjoyed telling them. The stories were a form of entertainment, but they were also much more. The stories provided me with a sense of belonging and purpose, an understanding of my connections. They taught me about who I am and about the importance of respect for and responsibility to my ancestors, myself, my family, and all living things.

They inspired feelings of confidence and belonging that nurtured my spirit and my capacity for action.

In our writing, Michael and I draw on Indigenous storytelling practice. As we write, we are conscious of our responsibilities as tellers, and we recognize the significance of establishing a relationship with our readers. Within an oral practice, "storytelling implicates the listener [reader] into becoming an active participant in the experience of the story."[15] Jo-ann Archibald of the Stó:lō Nation describes the synergistic interaction between storyteller, listener, and story as a critical storywork principle.[16] The relationships between the teller, the listener, the text, and the meanings they co-construct within the storytelling context is for us part of the potential power of storytelling. Although this book provides access to our stories through reading, we are, in some respects, asking our readers to become "hearers" with the responsibilities of listenership. Within Indigenous storytelling traditions, careful attending is the responsibility of the audience. Archibald (2008) writes that it is vital to listen and then to go away and think deeply about the meanings of the story. She reminds us that listening is an active role that must be deliberately accepted. An interest in or a concern with the story is not sufficient; members of a listening audience must be willing to do the work of listening.

These elements matter to the story being told and the story being heard. Michael and I write stories that invite readers to lean in, hear, and make their meanings. We document the diversities and complexities of Indigenous people's lives. We include our meaning-making experiences of and responses to the suffering and profound losses brought about by settler colonialism. Just as importantly, the stories document how Indigenous people draw on ancestral teachings to survive and thrive. Writing ourselves into the story and sharing our meaning-making creates space for readers to see themselves in the story and to make their meaning as part of the process. We take our demands on readers seriously and recognize "the need to speak clearly and truthfully, the need to understand that when you speak, you are calling upon others to commit time and attention."[17] This understanding of

the responsibilities that go along with being storytellers informs our writing. Michael and I are co-writers of the Braiding Histories stories that appear in Chapter 5. He provided writing and editing support to the settler Canadians whose stories appear in Chapter 2. He is also a writing mentor and editor for me.

Chapter 4, "Learning from Contemporary Indigenous Artists," was completed with assistance from Sara Roque. In her position as Aboriginal Arts Officer at the Ontario Arts Council, Roque played a critical role in supporting emerging Indigenous artists. Her knowledge of contemporary Indigenous art contributed to the organization and selection of artists featured in Chapter 4. It is further informed by my daughter Vanessa Dion Fletcher. Vanessa is a mid-career artist, and my learning about artistic creation comes in large part from my conversations with her about what it means to make art. While I had been including visual art in my teaching for some time, Vanessa helped me understand the way art works as a teaching and learning strategy. "My art is a response to questions that I am thinking about – I don't necessarily know what those questions are until I am finished the work."[18] This conversation made me realize that, in part, art is an invitation to observe and experience the artist's process. Thus, I understand engaging with art as an observational and experiential teaching and learning exchange. The images in Chapter 4 are meant to be looked at and talked about before, during, and after reading the stories that accompany the images.

Indigenous Pedagogy

Stories have always been valued within Indigenous cultures as a means of teaching and learning. Stories are not just entertainment but power. They reflect the deepest, most intimate perceptions, relationships, and attitudes of a people and can be used to bring harmony and balance to all beings that inhabit their nation's universe.[19] Within Indigenous conceptions of story and history, the concern is not with a chronological telling of events; history is neither linear nor steeped

in notions of social progress and evolution.[20] As Vine Deloria Jr. of the Sioux Nation has written, "The nation's stories reflect what is important to a group of people as a group. Historical events were either of the distant past and regarded as such or vivid memories of the tribe that occupied a prominent important place in the people's perspective and understanding of their situation."[21] Michael and I are sharing stories that are "vivid memories" of events that occupy a prominent place in our perspective and understanding of our situation. These texts inform and reflect who we are and our experience of being Indigenous in Canada. We are sharing with good intentions and hoping to engage readers in learning from the stories we tell. We aim to expand and deepen readers' understanding of Indigenous people, of themselves, and of themselves in relationship with Indigenous people.

This book is framed by my understanding of Indigenous pedagogies. My interest in pedagogy is rooted in my desire to understand how and what people learn, what gets in the way of learning, and how to accomplish teaching and learning that contributes to well-being. In my work within Indigenous education, I have come to know and value Indigenous approaches, including story, observation, and experiential learning. The stories in this book are meant to be experienced, reflected on, questioned, talked about, and talked back to. Visual art is included to recognize the work of contemporary Indigenous artists and their contribution to disrupting the dominant narrative. Importantly, I know that images portraying Indigenous people as Romantic, Mythical people of the past continue to circulate in the public domain, significantly contributing to what and how people "know" about Indigeneity. The work of the artists disrupts those narratives and gives access to alternative ways of knowing ourselves and each other.

About Positionality

In a traditional storytelling setting, there is a connection between the storyteller and the story listeners. Speakers and listeners have a shared understanding of their responsibilities. Furthermore, they are speaking

and listening from a collective body of shared knowledge.[22] In her discussion of cross-cultural/cross-racial oral events, Jocelyn Donlon suggests that when crossing cultural and racial boundaries, tellers risk finding listeners who do not share their "critical beliefs" – that is, beliefs that contribute to accomplishing understanding between themselves and their listeners inside a "mutual belief space."[23] Kimberly Blaeser explains the challenges Indigenous writers confront:

> In their work, they often find themselves negotiating against the authority of the very written tradition in which they are engaged: challenging the rules of writing, challenging the truth of historical accounts, challenging the privileging of text. Their work often rewrites, writes over, writes through, writes differently, writes itself against the Western literary tradition. Native writers often tell a different story, tell it from a different perspective, from a different worldview. They challenge the reigning literary conventions and the enshrined styles of writing both in principle and in practice.[24]

Michael and I write from this position, with the realization that our readers may not be familiar with our approach. What is more, it may feel alienating. We encourage readers to hear the story being told, to not interrupt the storyteller in order to absorb and respond to the whole of the story, to make their meaning within the context of their lives. We also realize that readers may need additional information and may want to check facts and get names, dates, and definitions; a glossary therefore provides details, background information, and links to additional resources to extend learning.

More about the Chapters

All of the chapters in this book draw on Indigenous theories of teaching and learning. Relying on art and story, my intention is to cultivate relationships between readers and storytellers, between readers and artists. While Chapters 1 through 3 work best read sequentially, in

Chapters 4 and 5 readers are invited to move back and forth between art and story. The glossary and additional resources at the end are intended to be used throughout the reading of the book.

Chapter 1 sets the context for the book, with a discussion of the growing awareness on the part of many Canadians that Indigenous Peoples, our experiences, and our perspectives are relevant to all people living in Canada. Utilizing the "Perfect Stranger" concept introduced in *Braiding Histories*,[25] I describe a shift in people from being comfortably unaware to uncomfortably aware of how much they don't know and their emerging realization that they want and need to know more. I introduce "Requisites for Reconciliation," including Implication, Investment, Shared Interest, and Impact, explaining how prior learning cultivates a particular stance necessary for reconciliation to happen in respectful ways. The chapter prepares readers for engaging with the content of the book.

In Chapter 2, three settlers share their stories of coming to see themselves in relationship with Indigenous people. Libby Stephenson, Sheyfali Saujani, and Joe Wild each share their experiences and struggles with understanding what was missing from their knowledge of being Canadian. In the telling of their stories, they address issues and concerns, including appropriation, stereotypes, fear, anger, and guilt. This chapter reflects the work required to recognize implication and responsibility.

In Chapter 3, I tell the history of Indigenous–non-Indigenous relationship as a cohesive narrative that can be read from beginning to end. I frame the chapter with my questions about what happened in the relationship between Indigenous people and newcomers, from first contact to today. Reflecting on what I learned in school and the confusion I felt about being Indigenous, the chapter focuses on the dominant narrative of Canadian history and what was missing from that narrative. I address how Indigenous Peoples, initially friends and allies of the newcomers, became the "Indian problem," and how the reserve system, the Indian Act, and residential schools were a response to the problem. The final section addresses recuperation and

resurgence, including a response to the 1969 White Paper, the birth of the National Indian Brotherhood, and the ongoing resistance movement. This is a story told in broad strokes. It is my story of coming to understand what happened and why Indigenous Peoples, who once had sovereignty over our lives and territories, now live under the rule of an imposed state authority. However, our political difference has not been erased and continues to live on.

Inspired by the oft-quoted words of Métis leader Louis Riel, "My people will sleep for 100 years, but when they awake, it will be the artists who will give them their spirit back,"[26] Chapter 4 uses the work of contemporary Indigenous artists to expand on crucial issues and concerns introduced in Chapter 2. Through their artistic practice, many contemporary Indigenous artists are drawing on ancestral teachings to make sense of and contribute to knowledge and understanding of history. Chapter 4 includes images that inspire engagement, provoke questions, and initiate learning. Drawing on both the artists' statements and discussions with educators and art critics, each image is followed by three to four paragraphs of text that provide readers with opportunities to engage deeply with ideas introduced in the artwork. Topics include residential schools, child welfare, land, community, and Indigenous language, worldviews, and family relationships.

Chapter 5 is a collection of stories that provides opportunities for readers to engage with the specific impacts of colonialism on Indigenous people's lives. As a collection, titled "The Braiding Histories Stories," these stories focus on individual people, showing how policies and practices impacted individuals, their families, their communities, and their nations. For example, while many Canadians know about the building of the railroad, they do not understand how the need for control of land on the Prairies is implicated in the starvation of the Cree and their forced removal to reserve land. This chapter includes previously published stories about Shawnadithit, Mistahimaskwa, and Audrey Dion, addressing both early contact and the impacts of disease, overhunting, and the Indian Act.[27] It includes stories about a post-secondary Mi'kmaq youth, a mother of mixed

Indigenous/non-Indigenous ancestry, a Black-Indigenous educator/activist, and an adult artist/educator.

The conclusion provides a summary and review of the critical issues addressed in the book, and a discussion on next steps. Returning to the requisites for reconciliation introduced in Chapter 1, it highlights some significant changes achieved since the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was published and challenges readers to consider their roles and responsibilities in accomplishing new and better relationships with Indigenous people and all of creation.

Informed by my understanding of Indigenous pedagogy, this book relies on theories of learning that put relationship, responsibility, and respect at the centre. I appreciate that readers may need specifics about some of the key events, concepts, policies, and practices referred to. The expanded glossary and additional resources at the end of the book provide these details. Each entry begins with a quote from the book, putting the term or concept in context, followed by a definition and detailed description, as well as background information and additional resources to extend learning.

1
REQUISITES FOR RECONCILIATION

A group of high school students are on a twelve-day canoe trip in Algonquin Park. The students attend a private school, and most are from upper-middle-class families. They are almost exclusively white. It is early in the term, but the students have been together long enough to have learned a little bit about each other. In particular, they know that one of their classmates is Indigenous. It is Day 5 of the trip and the fifth straight day of rain. The sixteen students and their two teachers have stopped for lunch. They have paddled to shore and are sitting in their canoes, trying to stay warm. Brenda turns to Niki and asks, "Niki, don't you know how to do a rain dance or something to make it stop raining?" When Niki turns toward her teachers, they turn away. Niki responds with a deep sigh of exasperation and the moment passes. However, for Niki and for her teachers, the question, the asking, and the turning away never pass.

Brenda's question, premised on stereotypical ways of knowing, exposes her lack of knowledge, creates discomfort, and, though likely unintentionally, causes harm. It imposes an expectation and a responsibility on Niki, as if – by virtue of her status as an Indigenous person – she is in some way responsible for providing a solution to the group's less than pleasant experience in the natural environment. When Niki turns to her teachers for assistance, the teachers, who know enough to know that the question is problematic, turn away, pretending that

they didn't hear. In turning away, they abandon their responsibilities to both Niki and Brenda. Brenda's question draws attention to Niki's difference with no consideration for her difference. For me, the significance of this exchange is not whether we can tolerate the asking of such questions but whether we can recognize the teaching and learning potential of such questions, work through our discomfort, and reflect on what they reveal. Might an understanding of what is at stake when we turn away motivate a turning toward?

Recognizing and Working Through Discomfort

During the past thirty years, my teaching and research have focused on identifying and understanding how to engage Canadians in teaching and learning from Indigenous people's experiences and perspectives. When I started this work, I wrote about resistance, identifying what I called the Perfect Stranger position.[1] In my experience, educators, like many Canadians, positioned themselves as perfect strangers, telling me, "I can't teach this content, I know nothing about Indigenous people, I have no Indigenous friends, I didn't grow up near a reserve, I didn't learn anything when I was in school. I am a perfect stranger to Indigenous people."[2] I wrote about the allure and enticing nature of this position, explaining how it is ultimately an avoidance tactic. If you are a perfect stranger to Indigenous people, you have no responsibility for doing the work required to accomplish justice and equity in the relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. In this book I am responding to a hopeful shift – what I am calling the Not-So-Perfect Stranger. This shift reflects a significant move – rather than turning away, many Canadians are turning toward, wanting to know, wanting to understand, and asking, "If this has something to do with me, how do I make sense of it, what do I need to know, what am I to do?"

This turning has potential and thus interests me a great deal. As much as I want to celebrate it, I want, more importantly, to understand, learn from, and respond to the questions and concerns people have as they engage with the challenge of working through[3] the history

and ongoing implications of settler colonialism. Drawing on my teaching, research, and public lectures, in the following section I share my responses to frequently asked questions and comments that I hear from Canadians as they struggle to make sense of the relationship between Indigenous and settler Canadians. The national dialogue on reconciliation has generated interest, yet many people continue to experience resistance when hearing Indigenous people's voices. As much as they want to understand and contribute to new and more just relationships, they continue to encounter challenges. Identifying and reflecting on common points of resistance is a kind of pre-emptive strategy to prepare for learning from the art and stories shared in subsequent chapters. Before taking up those questions, I want to address Brenda, Niki, and their teachers' turning away.

Returning to Brenda's Question

I recognize the desire to avoid questions about Indigenous people and the discomfort those questions cause, but I believe that we cannot afford to lose the potential learning they offer. Investigating why people ask such questions can open them up to how their experiences, beliefs, and desires are projected onto Indigenous people and impede their ability to see and hear Indigenous perspectives. Sometimes people's words and actions in the present are informed by their pasts, and their words and actions make sense "within a frame of perception that is so familiar, so safe, that it is difficult to risk changing it even when they know their perceptions are distorted, limited, constricted by that old view."[4] If, for example, rather than turning away from Brenda's question or simply reprimanding her for an expression of stereotypical ways of knowing about Indigenous people, the teachers turned toward the students, investigating their own and their students' understanding of and reactions to the question, what might they have had the opportunity to learn?

Asking what students know and don't know about the history of Indigenous Peoples in Canada, what stories have they heard and what

stories do they tell? In particular, on a canoe trip, in the northern Ontario landscape, with her Indigenous classmate alongside her, what story does Brenda hear and in what ways is it different from the story that Niki is experiencing? And – this is key – Brenda's question draws attention to a significant difference, and ignoring it does harm. Reflecting on and questioning the question opens possibilities for learning. For example, Brenda may have known full well that Niki did not know a rain dance, and her question might have been an attempt to add humour to a miserable situation. While Brenda can afford to find humour in asking Niki to do a dance, for Niki there is nothing funny about the loss of access to her ancestral knowledge.

What might Niki have been able to learn about herself from this question had her teachers supported further inquiry? What might she have wanted to say and teach others?

- I want you to know how much I wish that I *did* know about the dances, songs, and ceremonies of my ancestors.
- I want you to appreciate my sense of loss, how deeply I mourn for the loss of Indigenous knowledge.
- I want *you* to know the stories of *our* ancestors, which brought us to this place where I, an Anishinaabe student, sat with you and the rest of our class and listened to our white teachers teach me how to paddle a canoe.

Attending to disruptive questions illustrates how something that appears innocent may be complicated for Indigenous students. If, rather than turning away to avoid discomfort, the teachers turned toward the students and worked with them and with the discomfort, what might they have accomplished?

Engaging with Art and Story: Attending to Disruptive Questions

We bring to any story an existing narrative frame that helps us order an understanding of how things are connected and why certain actors

act as they do. That is, we make sense of the stories we hear based on our existing knowledge frames and beliefs. When listening to a story that originates from outside of that frame (or one that ruptures our frame), our commitments to a given knowledge base and belief system may obstruct our ability to understand the story. In response, we may find ourselves "bothered" by questions that demand our attention, questions that Simon and Armitage call "shadow questions."[5] The answers to these questions are typically not found within the text but are questions that signify an "asking after," something we need to know in order to make sense of the text. While attending to these questions may seem to take us away from hearing the story, I argue that paying attention to the questions addresses our positionality, helping us recognize our differences and the implications of those differences in how we understand and make sense of the stories we hear.

Reading and listening audiences are not the same; the responsibilities of listenership are understood differently.[6] I recognize that, at different times and in different ways, Canadians are listening to Indigenous people's stories from outside of a shared critical belief space. I have come to appreciate that the responsibility of careful attending includes attending to the questions our stories provoke. It is equally important to think about how and to whom listeners pose their questions. As an Indigenous educator, I have accepted a pedagogical responsibility and am sharing stories purposefully, with the intention of provoking questions, and I write conscious of the questions I anticipate from readers. It may be that readers are unable to make sense of my stories without first addressing the shadow questions that limit their understanding. Dialogue and self-reflection before, during, and after reading is critical to learning from the stories.

Rather than setting questions aside, being afraid to ask, we ought to interrogate ourselves about why our questions are important and necessary and what assumptions and judgments they imply. If, rather than allowing our questions to divert us from the story, we use them to begin working through the story by investigating the terms that not only motivate but also define the questions, then we can begin to

"hear" the story differently. Asking and responding to our own questions provides a way to scrutinize what constitutes our understanding in order to be conscious of what we bring to the story, opening up the possibility for us to understand differently. We must be able to hold up our responses for scrutiny, allowing us to enter into critical dialogue about our relationship to that which initiated the question.

In the following section, I discuss questions that I hear from people who are engaging with the history of Indigenous–non-Indigenous relationships. These questions help me understand the challenges people confront as they think about reconciliation and what it entails.

Turning toward Questions, Concerns, and Commitments

Learning from Indigenous people's experiences and perspectives initiates a range of questions and concerns. For me it is helpful to reflect on the issues and challenges people confront as they begin to think about themselves in relationship with Indigenous people.[7] Reflecting on what I hear people say, I identify four requisites for reconciliation. I am not concerned here with what reconciliation is or must include; that is a complex and ongoing discussion, beyond the scope of this book. I am suggesting that these requisites are significant as people move from a place of disinterest to actively searching for ways to join the conversation about new and better relationships between Indigenous people and other Canadians.

Requisites for Reconciliation

1. *Implication* – recognizing that all Canadians are in relationship with Indigenous people
2. *Investment* – making a commitment of time and energy to learn from Indigenous people's experiences and perspectives
3. *Shared interest* – appreciating that Indigenous people's well-being is in the best interests of all Canadians

4. *Impact* – wanting my actions to have a positive impact in creating new and better relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people

As more and more Canadians begin to hear Indigenous perspectives, the potential for creating real change in the relationship grows. As much as I would like to focus exclusively on creating the change, I recognize that learning from the history of colonialism poses challenges, and I want to continue understanding, learning from, and responding to those challenges. Understanding why it is difficult, and having some sense of how and why, in spite of the challenges, people are still interested in and willing to do the work of learning, is a useful step toward creating change.

Wrestling with Implication

I was speaking with a group of teachers in eastern Ontario about treaty rights and why it is necessary for all Canadians to learn how our government failed to follow through on treaty promises, when I was interrupted by a familiar question. As I was explaining how broken treaties contribute to the barriers Indigenous people confront in establishing economic security, an audience member asked, "But isn't that what we all want? We all want economic security. Why should Indigenous people get special status?"

This question brings to the surface two critical considerations that many Canadians struggle to understand: Indigenous people occupy a distinctive place on this land, and Indigenous people have not been treated the same as every other Canadian. Canada was established on Indigenous land, and much of that land was acquired through treaty negotiations. Boundaries were determined and access to resources, rights, and responsibilities were recorded in treaty agreements. Understanding the story of Canada requires knowledge of treaty history, including the ways in which broken treaties benefited some and devastated others.

I recognize the desire to forget, to argue that the past does not matter in the present, to collapse difference and say we are all the same. While some may find this comforting, it is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore the perspectives of Indigenous people, presenting evidence that connects broken treaties to the current economic disadvantages people encounter in their day-to-day lives. Hearing these voices challenges the dominant narrative of Canada the good, defender of equity and justice. In many ways, treaty education challenges Canadians' expectations of ongoing entitlement to land and resources. It calls into question the discourse of meritocracy that allows Canadians to believe that individual wealth and well-being is earned and not the result of unfair advantages given to some at the expense of others. To understand current conditions, it is important to learn about who had access to land and who was denied access to land and resources. Indigenous Peoples were removed from their traditional territories to "land reserved for Indians."[8] Our land was transferred to the state and became "Crown lands." Settlers were sold land or in some instances granted land in exchange for their service to governments. In some instances, land was granted to settlers in exchange for their labour, clearing and farming the land. Indigenous Peoples were denied access to our land at the same time as settlers were being granted land. These policies and practices from the past have a bearing on the present.

The phrase *wrestling with implication* is helpful because for many people it is a challenge to recognize that as Canadians they are in relationship with Indigenous people, and treaty history is their history too. Implication and investment are intertwined: as people recognize *implication,* they are often more willing to *invest* in hearing Indigenous perspectives. Sometimes, hearing our perspective triggers a sense of implication and deeper investment.

Investing in Hearing Our Voices

I was doing research in northern Ontario when a secondary school student explained, "We don't even know what we want because we

never had it. Why do our teachers think we know our histories, our languages, our teachings? And why do they judge us and ask us, 'Do you speak your language, how Indigenous are you, what's your clan?'"

Many Indigenous people are participating in resurgence. While we are bothered by Canadians' lack of knowledge and understanding of our histories and contemporary lived experiences, we are most concerned with recuperating and improving access to our languages, traditional knowledge, and cultural practices for ourselves and our children. While Canadians are starting to learn about the impacts of cultural genocide perpetrated through residential schools, most don't know that in Canada laws were passed that made it a crime to speak our languages, practise our culture, and pass on stories and ceremonies to our children and grandchildren. Indigenous students are made to feel ashamed of their own lack of knowledge or are judged by outsiders as less authentically Indigenous because of what they don't know, or both. Most people do not understand that *not knowing* was the goal of Canadian policies of forced assimilation.

Isolating Indigenous people on reserves, and creating policies that outlawed language and cultural practices, contributed to the chasm that exists today between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. It also meant that many Indigenous people had limited access to language and cultural practices. While this is changing, it continues to be a challenge resulting from colonialism. Creating change means that non-Indigenous people need to learn from and with us, and while Indigenous people have survived colonialism, many of us, especially our youth, also need opportunities to learn. While we all live the legacies of colonialism, not enough of us understand its intricacies. In many ways, we need to reconcile our own histories, our familial and community histories. Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people need opportunities to learn how their ancestors were implicated in colonialism. We all need a better understanding of what was done in order to recuperate from it.

Hearing and learning from Indigenous voices requires an investment of time, attention, and thought. Many Canadians are recognizing

the need to invest time and energy in learning from Indigenous perspectives. Increasing numbers of Indigenous-focused courses are being offered in secondary and post-secondary programs; Indigenous people are much more frequently featured in the media; and Indigenous art, film, and writing is increasingly being produced and shared. Learning from and with Indigenous people and supporting the creation of space for Indigenous people to engage with and participate in cultural practices is an investment in shared well-being. Remember not to judge people for what they don't know; rather, invest in their learning.

Recognizing Shared Best Interests

After I had given a talk for teacher candidates at the University of British Columbia, a small group gathered to speak with me. I was not immediately surprised by the student who explained how, as a settler, she particularly appreciated the space I offered her for learning from Indigenous voices. She asked, "Can non-Indigenous people participate in reconciliation if we are relegated to a place of guilty, greedy, violent oppressor?"

Understanding that the relationship between Indigenous people and settlers was and, in many ways, continues to be premised on greed, power, and control over our bodies and land does not mean that people today want the current relationship to continue. The path to creating new and better relationships requires knowledge and understanding of existing relationships as well as knowledge of how we came to occupy these places in relationship with each other. If non-Indigenous people are locked into positions of the guilty perpetrator of violent oppression and Indigenous people are perpetually required to be victims, new and better relationships are impossible. Historically our relationships have been defined by judgments about the inferiority and incapacities of Indigenous people, and the refusal to recognize and respect difference. The relationship premised on judgments of "less than" that justified the theft of land and resources needs to be identified, investigated, and reconciled. In spite of the attempts

at eradicating Indigenous people, we have survived – and must be reckoned with in respectful ways that are premised on the legitimacy of our position as original people.

For me this question surfaces a serious challenge – how to teach about colonialism without reproducing dominant narratives centring violence and oppression that require Indigenous people to be perpetual victims of violence and require non-Indigenous people to be guilty oppressors. We cannot erase the violence of colonialism, but we cannot focus exclusively on violence. We can invest in learning and commit to actions that remediate harm and contribute to renewed relationships.

Contributing to Change and Having an Impact

My teaching and research bring me into contact with many non-Indigenous people who are willing and wanting to engage with learning the history of settler colonialism. My question to them is *why*: "Why are you doing this work? What motivates you to engage with this difficult history?" In response, I am told, "I do it because I want to make a difference, I want to have an impact."

The desire to have an impact is a positive motivating force that inspires people to take action and do the work of learning so as to contribute to creating equity and justice. As much as this desire to make things better is good, it can derive from a problematic place. When the desire to have an impact comes from an uninterrogated place of privilege, it can reproduce the saviour-victim relationship. When an audience member tells me that they want to help and asks what they can do to help, my response is a gentle reminder to take responsibility and investigate the ways in which Canadians have benefited from colonialism.

I ask people to learn about the land they live on: Whose traditional territory is it? When were Indigenous people removed from the land? How was the land used before and after contact? And who became wealthy from the land? In my years of working in the field of Indigenous studies I have found that the vast majority of Canadians

want to have a positive impact on the world. Learning to work with consciousness of their own place in the relationship shifts the "how can I help you" approach to "how can I take responsibility for the actions of my ancestors and work to establish/re-establish respectful relationships with you?" My faith in the power of education comes in part from working with people who are committed to acting in support of positive change. These questions and comments inform my understanding of the complexities of speaking and listening across difference. My work is grounded in a profound faith in learning: as Canadians take up the work of learning both *from* and *with* Indigenous people, there is hope.

Settler Colonialism, Anti-Indigenous Racism, and the Not-So-Perfect-Stranger Framework

Disrupting settler consciousness calls for settlers to understand the complexities of whiteness and settlement. Settler colonialism occurs when colonizers come to stay and establish political orders for themselves. It operates through a logic of elimination that aims to accomplish the disappearance of the native in order to build settler polities on expropriated land.[9] White supremacy plays a vital role in settler colonialism in that it relies on the assumption that whiteness and white ways of being are superior to Indigenous ways of being and are therefore desired. It requires the Indigenous population to want to or be forced to assimilate into the settler population, or both.

The Not-So-Perfect-Stranger framework for engaging with and learning from Indigenous art and story is informed by the growing awareness of anti-Indigenous racism, with an emphasis on unstructuring settler consciousness. This requires readers to be vigilant about their tendency to avoid implication, their desire to see themselves as innocent participants in settler colonialism. It asks that readers resist the need to justify or explain away their privilege, to be aware of the ease with which they adopt a condescending attitude that requires Indigenous people to occupy the position of pitiful victims,

or damaged people in need of healing. This learning requires recognition of the power of Indigenous people to represent ourselves, accepting the invitation to learn from us in the service of establishing responsible relationships. The goal is not simply to learn, feel bad, and carry on. The goal is to renegotiate the terms of living on Indigenous lands. It is most certainly about the return of stolen land and stolen wealth.

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