

# Educating for Reconciliation in the Economics Classroom

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**Abstract:** Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission has sparked new interest in the concept of "educating for reconciliation," though calls to "indigenize" or "decolonize" the classroom preceded the TRC's work by several years. This paper argues that economics educators' responsibilities in settler-colonial contexts are two-fold: to teach students about the economic history of colonialism and its contemporary implications in a way that equips them to contribute to real economic change, and to foster respect and mutual understanding by acknowledging the legitimacy of Indigenous perspectives on the economy. The paper concludes with some suggestions for practical change in the economics classroom.

**Keywords:** economics education; economics; educating for reconciliation; indigenize; decolonize; pluralism; Indigenous; Aboriginal; Truth and Reconciliation Commission; Canada; economic history; colonialism; settler-colonial.

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## Educating for Reconciliation in the Economics Classroom

### 1 Introduction

In 2015, Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) released a report detailing its seven-year investigation into the country's Indian residential school system, part of a broader colonial system aimed at securing control over land and resources in what is now called Canada. The TRC's report offers 94 calls to action aimed at healing the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada. Central to these recommendations is the concept of educating for reconciliation. As the report states, "Much of the current state of troubled relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians is attributable to educational institutions and what they have taught, or failed to teach, over many generations. Despite that history, or, perhaps more correctly, because of its potential, the Commission believes that education is also the key to reconciliation" (2015, p. 234). Or, as TRC chair Murray Sinclair put it more bluntly: "Education has gotten us into this mess, and education will get us out" (Anderson 2016).

The call to educate for reconciliation is not new to the TRC. An earlier, even more comprehensive investigation into the Indigenous-settler relationship in Canada also included public education among its recommendations (Canada. Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. 1996a). Literature from multiple countries on "decolonizing" or "indigenizing" education predates the TRC by several years, with examples from a variety of disciplines at the elementary, secondary, and post-secondary levels (Aikenhead and Elliott 2010; Battiste 2013; Cajete 1999; Cannon 2012; Dion 2009; Kapyrka and Dockstator 2012; Kitchen and Raynor 2013; Kuokkanen 2007; LeBlanc and LeBlanc 2011; Long and Van Arragon 2014; Mercurieff and Roderick 2013; Pete et al. 2013; Sterenberg and McDonnell 2010). However, the national prominence of the TRC's work brought a new degree of attention to this issue. In response to the TRC's recommendations, several provinces committed to revising their elementary and secondary school curriculums (KAIROS Canada 2015). Universities Canada, a consortium of 97 post-secondary institutions across Canada, released a set of "Principles on Indigenous Education" on the heels of the TRC report (Universities Canada 2015), and many universities have launched initiatives aimed at implementing them (M. MacDonald 2016).

What responsibilities do economics educators, specifically, have to educate for reconciliation? This paper begins from the premise that the goal of economics education is to equip students to engage with real-life economic decisions and problems (Reardon 2012). In Canada, as in other settler-colonial states, one of the key barriers to reconciliation is the shockingly poor economic status of many Indigenous people and communities, rooted in an ongoing history of colonialism. This already suggests that economics educators have a role to play in equipping students to knowledgeably and respectfully engage in these issues. However, such issues tend to garner little attention in economics education in Canada; even in pluralist efforts such as the "Economics for Everyone" popular education campaign (Stanford 2015), issues of race and colonialism play only a minor role. This, in turn, reflects the long-standing neglect of these issues in mainstream and even in pluralist branches of economics research (Obeng-Odoom 2016).

However, the TRC, echoing earlier work by Indigenous scholars, also argues that educating for reconciliation must foster genuine respect for Indigenous peoples by acknowledging the legitimacy of

Indigenous knowledge systems. Economics, among all disciplines, is one of the most closed to other than Euro-Western perspectives (Zein-Elabdin 2004). This exclusivity impoverishes the discipline and reinforces false assumptions of racial and cultural superiority among students; it also stands in the way of achieving the economic and political changes that are necessary for the respectful co-existence of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people (Fanon 1967; Freire 1970). Thus, this paper argues that economics educators have two responsibilities with respect to educating for reconciliation: to teach students about the economic history of colonialism in a way that equips them to participate in the necessary economic changes, and to make room for Indigenous perspectives in the curriculum in a way that fosters genuine respect and understanding.

Reconciliation is only possible in the context of mutually respectful relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous partners. I write as a white descendant of European immigrants to Canada, living and teaching in Edmonton, Alberta – Treaty Six territory. Thus, the work I describe in this paper is not work I can complete on my own. However, non-Indigenous educators have a responsibility to educate ourselves, especially by listening carefully to the voices of Indigenous scholars who have already written extensively on these issues. We must draw on their insights to critically evaluate our own practices and call ourselves and our scholarly communities to account; we cannot expect our Indigenous colleagues to do all the work for us. Thus, I offer these reflections humbly, aware of my limitations, and respectfully invite conversation and correction. I also acknowledge that Indigenous educators, and those who primarily teach Indigenous students, may well approach these issues differently.

The paper begins by delving deeper into the literature on educating for reconciliation, focusing especially on the work of the TRC and Indigenous scholars. Many of these scholars are located in Canada, but much of this literature is relevant to other settler-colonial states as well (Cajete 1994; Kelly 2013; Mackinlay and Barney 2014). I then examine what this literature might imply for economics educators, exploring in more depth the dual responsibilities introduced above. I close by offering some suggestions for future action.

## **2 The call to educate for reconciliation**

The TRC's report recognizes two broad components of education for reconciliation, both of which echo previous literature on this topic. One of the problems the TRC identifies is that non-Indigenous Canadians have not been taught the history necessary to understand the rights of Indigenous peoples, their role in the development of Canada, and how colonialism has shaped the problems that Indigenous communities face today. The TRC, therefore, calls on schools to teach students about "residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples' historical and contemporary contributions to Canada" (2015, p. 238).

Of course, reconciliation requires Canadians not just to know this history, but also to understand their own place in it and their responsibilities for change. As Cree scholar Dwayne Donald says, "Decolonization in the Canadian context can only occur when Aboriginal peoples and Canadians face each other across historic divides, deconstruct their shared past, and engage critically with the realization that their present and future is similarly tied together" (2009, p. 5). Dene scholar Glen Coulthard (2014) emphasizes that reconciliation must include not only an acknowledgement of what

happened in the past, but a commitment to making things right as we move forward. To participate in this, students need to be helped to acknowledge their personal roles in ongoing settler-colonialism. The goal is not only to understand and empathize, but also to accept accountability and work to rectify injustices (Regan 2010; Siemens 2017).

The second component of educating for reconciliation, according to the TRC, is the transformation of “the education system itself...into one that rejects the racism embedded in colonial systems of education and treats Aboriginal and Euro-Canadian knowledge systems with equal respect” (2015, p. 239). This transformation is aimed at fostering respect for Indigenous ways of knowing and doing among both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. Again, this echoes arguments previously made by Indigenous scholars. The TRC cites the work of Mi’kmaw scholar Marie Battiste, who argues that false assumptions of racial and cultural superiority cause “Canadian schools [to] teach a silent curriculum of Eurocentric knowledge that is not accommodating to other ways of knowing and learning” (2013, p. 66). By fostering self-doubt among Indigenous students about the value of their own culture, knowledge, and languages, she says, this “cognitive imperialism” reduces their capacity for achievement. She calls Canadian educators to decolonize the educational system by confronting its Eurocentric bias and “respectfully blend[ing] Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy with Euro-Canadian epistemology and pedagogy to create an innovative ethical, trans-systemic Canadian educational system” (p. 168).

Sami scholar Rauna Kuokkanen makes a similar argument at the post-secondary level. She argues that “academic theories and practices marginalize, exclude, and discriminate against other than dominant Western epistemic and intellectual traditions” (2007, p. 66), a practice which she terms “epistemic ignorance.” Western perspectives are assumed to be universal; other perspectives, including Indigenous perspectives, are neither taught nor, usually, even acknowledged. She suggests that this makes the university an unwelcoming place for Indigenous students and faculty, and demonstrates a fundamental disrespect and inhospitality towards Indigenous peoples and their ways of knowing. Kuokkanen calls on the university to “recognize the gift of indigenous epistememes” (2007, p. 3) along with its own responsibilities to reciprocate for this gift.

Numerous initiatives, in a variety of disciplines, offer practical examples of how Indigenous perspectives might be incorporated into the curriculum. For example, the principle of Two-Eyed Seeing, which involves “learning to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous ways of knowing and from the other eye with the strengths of Western ways of knowing and to using both of these eyes together” (Hatcher et al. 2009, p. 146), has been incorporated into the science curriculum in both Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan (Aikenhead and Elliott 2010; Hatcher et al. 2009; Munroe et al. 2013). Place-based education, which experientially focuses on people’s relationships with the specific place in which they live, has been implemented in mathematics, science, and environmental education curriculums (Cajete 1994; Michell et al. 2008; Sterenberg and McDonnell 2010). Indigenous Métissage, an approach developed by Cree scholar Dwayne Donald, problematizes specific places or artifacts, such as a fort, by juxtaposing stories from multiple perspectives with a focus on Aboriginal-Canadian relationships (Donald 2009). Lenape-Potawatomi scholar Susan Dion’s “Braiding Histories” project focuses on telling the life stories of Indigenous people in a way that challenges the common conception of “romanticized, mythical Others” (Dion 2009, p. 8) and encourages Canadians to reconsider their own role in ongoing and historical shared relationships with Indigenous peoples. For Cree educator Shauneen Pete and her

colleagues, indigenizing their post-secondary teaching means, among other things, privileging readings by Indigenous authors and using storytelling as a pedagogical tool (Pete et al. 2013). To the best of my knowledge, however, there is no literature that addresses the application of these ideas in the field of economics.

Universities Canada's "Principles on Indigenous Education" include both aspects of educating for reconciliation. The principles commit universities to, among other things, "Recognize the importance of indigenization of curricula through responsive academic programming, support programs, orientations, and pedagogies" and "Recognize the importance of providing greater exposure and knowledge for non-Indigenous students on the realities, histories, cultures and beliefs of Indigenous people in Canada" (Universities Canada 2015). In response to these principles, some universities have adopted mandatory Indigenous Studies requirements for all students. Leaders at the University of Winnipeg, for example, argue that such courses improve democratic engagement and prepare students more effectively for the workforce (Trimbee and Kinev 2015). However, some Indigenous scholars oppose this approach, arguing that it allows universities to avoid the hard work of acknowledging and correcting the continued exclusion of Indigenous perspectives throughout their discourses and practices (Kuokkanen 2016). Cree scholar Dwayne Donald cautions that such courses could consist of information *about* Indigenous peoples, rather than teaching *from* their perspectives, resulting in "an impoverished and diminished version...of Indigenous knowledge" (McInnes 2016). This suggests that even if mandatory Indigenous studies courses do become part of university efforts, they do not replace the need for broader changes across courses, programs and practices.

### 3 Decolonizing the economics classroom

What does all of this mean for economics educators, specifically? This section identifies some initial suggestions for topics, typically included in either mainstream or pluralist economics courses, where fruitful opportunities exist to incorporate material on Indigenous history, culture, rights and perspectives. It also describes a few examples of my own efforts along these lines. These offer, of course, only a starting point for discussion; it is to be hoped that further work and collaboration along these lines will contribute to a more widespread rethinking of the structure and content of economics education.

#### 3.1 Pluralism of economic systems and values

Prior to colonization, Indigenous communities had well-developed economies and trading systems (Dickason 2009). An abundance of natural resources provided adequate and sometimes bountiful livelihoods (Carter 1993; Spry 1983). Many Indigenous communities, in North America but also around the world, continue to follow traditional economic practices (Kuokkanen 2011). However, these practices have often been overlooked, dismissed, or misunderstood by researchers, leading to an inadequate understanding of the ways of life that continue to sustain millions of people (Hill 1966; Kuokkanen 2011).

Furthermore, these Indigenous economies were, and continue to be, built on values and ways of thinking that are different from those emphasized in standard economic thought. Rather than taking the abstract, deductive approach common in Western economics, Indigenous perspectives<sup>i</sup> are grounded in

lived experiences and tend to have a strong normative component. Anishnaabe scholar Winona LaDuke, drawing on teachings from Elders, defines the economy as “how we live” (2013).

For instance, rather than focusing on individual behaviour, Indigenous perspectives tend to focus on interdependence and relationship (Jobin 2014). As a Cree elder puts it, “we are not individualistic and independent of each other, much less the Creator. We have been born into a social order that is based on sacred laws and teachings of responsibility to one another. Hence, we are interconnected and interdependent beings” (Makokis 2010, p. 73). Thus, Indigenous economic teachings often focus on how humans are to relate to one another. Rather than efficiency, the emphasis is on sharing, generosity, and reciprocity (Jobin 2014; Kuokkanen 2007; Makokis 2010).

The relationship between humans and the land is also central to Indigenous economic thought. While mainstream economics treats land primarily as a factor of production, subject to human ownership and control, “Indigenous philosophies are premised on the belief that earth was created by a power external to human beings, who have a responsibility to act as stewards; since humans had no hand in making the earth, they have no right to 'possess' it or dispose of it as they see fit” (Alfred 1999, p. 60). Humans exist in equal relationship with the earth, and have a responsibility to treat it with respect (Ghostkeeper 2007; Jobin 2014; Makokis 2010; Olsen Dannemann 2009). This leads to profoundly different ideas about the goals of economic activity: “The dilemma for First Nations people is that mainstream economic development entails taking resources off the land and making a profit - in direct contrast to First Nations values and beliefs of sharing and reciprocity. They (First Nations) believe that one should only take what is required from the land in order to maintain balance and harmony” (Makokis 2010, p. 102). These perspectives are blended with a deep understanding of ecology and place that enables the lived application of such ideas.

The lack of attention to pluralist ways of thinking and doing leads not only to disrespect for Indigenous perspectives and Indigenous people themselves, but also to harmful policy prescriptions. As Makokis (2010) alludes, one implication of the Euro-Western dominance in economics is that prescriptions for economic renewal and development in Indigenous communities are often rooted in Western ways of thinking about the world, and may be incompatible with Indigenous ways of knowing and doing. This can happen on a personal level; Metis author Elmer Ghostkeeper describes the pressures on Indigenous people to abandon their traditional worldviews in order to make a living, drawing on his own experiences in the oil industry: “clear-cutting, piling, and burning brush was not a difficult task if trees, plants and wildlife habitat were not viewed as a sacred gift, but rather as something that had to be removed with the use of Cats in order for the oil company to develop natural gas for export” (2007, p. 65). But it can happen on a more systemic level as well. Cree scholar Shalene Jobin, for example, argues that the movement among First Nations to gain the capacity for self-determination by earning money through resource exploitation subjects them to neoliberalism and global capitalism while displacing Indigenous economic principles and relationships (Jobin 2014).

For many Indigenous scholars, therefore, decolonization requires that Indigenous people adopt fundamentally different economic practices. Jobin (2014) suggests that Indigenous communities should reclaim their own economic principles to guide their activities and initiatives and explores, from her own Cree perspective, what those principles might be. Kahnawake Mohawk scholar Taiaiake Alfred (1999), too, calls for the rejection of Western materialism and for economic development that is consistent with Indigenous values. Dene scholar Glen Coulthard argues that anticolonialism must include anticapitalism:

“For Indigenous nations to live, capitalism must die. And for capitalism to die, we must actively participate in the construction of Indigenous alternatives to it” (2014, p. 173). Others accept capitalism, but seek to shape it in a way that is consistent with Indigenous values (Champagne 2007; Newhouse 2000). There are many examples of Indigenous alternatives to Western economic practices (Brascoupe 2011; Corntassel 2012; Kamal and Martens 2015; LaDuke 2005; G. G. MacDonald et al. 2014; Wuttunee 2004, 2010). But these efforts are likely to be hindered if non-Indigenous Canadians are not prepared to understand why Indigenous people and communities might choose to do things differently.

Furthermore, non-Indigenous people may well find inspiration and insight in Indigenous perspectives to do things differently themselves. For example, ecological economists share Indigenous peoples’ concerns about the unsustainable relationship between humans and the earth. Continued respectful co-existence in Canada requires that we learn to shape our economy so that it stays within the boundaries of the natural environment. Many scholars have made the point that Indigenous perspectives, and traditions that come from thousands of years’ experience, offer guidance for living in a way that preserves the earth’s capacity to provide for future generations (Battiste 2013; Cajete 1994; Kuokkanen 2007; Trosper 2009). Another insight that can be drawn from Indigenous perspectives is the importance of social ties and reciprocity (Jobin 2014; Kuokkanen 2007; Makokis 2010). Through research on altruism, social norms, common resource management, and other departures from standard economic theory (e.g. Bowles 2008; Nyborg and Rege 2003; Ostrom 2015), economists – especially heterodox economists – are also coming to realize that an exclusive focus on the individual can blind us to important aspects of human behavior.

Initiatives from other disciplines provide some guidance for effectively incorporating Indigenous perspectives into economics classrooms. The model of two-eyed seeing (Hatcher et al. 2009), for example, sets Indigenous and Western perspectives alongside each other, not seeking to integrate them or to assimilate Indigenous knowledge into Western frameworks but to appreciate the insights of both. I have only begun exploring how this approach might work in my classes. For example, one of my Principles course readings describes the ecological economics goals of allocative efficiency, just distribution, and sustainable scale (Daly 1992). Alongside this article, I now also include a reading that gives the perspectives of Indigenous peoples from Latin America on the concept of “vivir bien” or “living well” (Dillon 2014). In an ecological economics course, I include a piece by Keetoowah Cherokee scholar Randy Woodley (2013) that gives an Indigenous perspective on the relationship between humans and the land. I have found that incorporating Indigenous perspectives in my teaching often means making time to consider fundamental questions and issues that I might not otherwise think to address in the course. Without a doubt, this enriches the learning experience and creates opportunities for fascinating discussions with the students.

In incorporating such readings, Kuokkanen cautions that educators should “allow different texts to dialogue with each other, but do not assume a context of neutral, symmetrical dialogue and do not attempt to smooth over the inevitable discontinuities. Above all, do not attempt to domesticate the ‘other’ through analysis, categorization, comparison, or ‘multicultural consumption’” (2007, pp. 154–155). I try to offer such readings with an attitude of respectful appreciation, not seeking to analyze or fit them into my own framework, but to remain open to what they have to teach us. Above all, it is essential that such readings offer Indigenous peoples’ own voices, rather than interpretation of their views by Western scholars. When possible, students benefit from the opportunity to hear directly from



Indigenous guest speakers. Of course, such invitations must follow local protocols and include appropriate compensation.

It is also essential to recognize that learning from Indigenous perspectives involves a responsibility to take action on issues of concern to Indigenous peoples (Korteweg and Russell 2012; Kuokkanen 2007; Schreiber 2012). For example, there have been cases where environmental groups, inspired by Indigenous teachings and sometimes even acting in partnership with Indigenous groups, have failed to heed the concerns of Indigenous peoples regarding land claims that are intimately related to the environmental concerns they have raised (Kuokkanen 2007; Manuel and Derrickson 2015). To draw on Indigenous teachings for our own purposes, without reciprocating by acknowledging and responding to the contemporary concerns of Indigenous people who developed that knowledge, is appropriation. This is a fundamental barrier to true respect and reconciliation.

### *3.2 Economic history, political economy, and resource management*

Canada's history is that of a settler-colonial state: although it is no longer subject to Britain, non-Indigenous settlers are still present in this country and control the majority of its governance, land and resources, as well as many aspects of the daily lives of Indigenous people (Coulthard 2014; Jobin 2014). As the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996b) and TRC (2015) reports make clear, this situation has had and continues to have many harmful impacts on Indigenous people living in this country (see also Anaya 2014). It is thus of key importance that students understand how this situation arose and its implications for contemporary economic issues and decision-making.

Colonialism was driven by the desire to obtain the rich land and resources of the new world. European incursions began with whaling and fishing off the Eastern coast and continued with the fur trade. Despite the benefits of the fur trade in bringing new goods into Indigenous communities, it also displaced traditional economic activities and left Indigenous peoples dependent on fickle international markets and vulnerable to exploitation by European trading partners (Tough 1996, 2005). Over time, the fur trade also resulted in the depletion of fur-bearing species across North America.

The next stage in colonization was the acquisition of land. Because many Indigenous peoples in the Americas did not live in permanent settlements, Europeans considered the land to be *terra nullius* (uninhabited land). The Doctrine of Discovery, based on a series of papal bulls in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, also held that European explorers had the right to claim any lands inhabited by "pagans" for their Christian monarchs (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015). Based on these ideas, European countries began simply issuing land grants and establishing colonies in the New World without permission or agreement from the Indigenous residents (Dickason 2009). This included granting the Hudson's Bay Company title to a vast tract of western land, sight unseen, in 1670.

In 1763, Britain's Royal Proclamation established that Indigenous lands could only be acquired by the Crown, through treaty negotiations. Over the next century and a half, treaties between the Crown and Indigenous groups were negotiated in much of what is now Canada. Settlers obtained rights to settle on and use the majority of the land, setting aside small reserves for the exclusive use of Indigenous peoples. Besides the reserves, Indigenous peoples received goods and small cash annuities, and were assured during treaty negotiations that they would retain rights to pursue their livelihoods of hunting, fishing, trapping and gathering on their traditional lands (Ray et al. 2000). Some treaties

included other provisions such as health care, education, assistance in times of famine, and equipment and livestock to establish agriculture on reserves.

However, Indigenous peoples and Europeans had very different views of the treaties into which they entered. In the European understanding, the signing of a treaty signified ownership by the Crown and the extinguishment of Aboriginal rights to the land; the goal was to ensure access to land for settlement and agriculture, as well as a variety of other natural resources (Tough 1996). Indigenous peoples, for their part, “looked upon the treaties as reciprocal arrangements by which they agreed to allow the British to share their lands in return for a guarantee that their rights would be protected” (Dickason 2011, p. 7). In the face of increasing encroachment by settlers on their lands and the disappearance of traditional means of sustenance, Indigenous peoples sought out treaties as a way of preserving some land for themselves and receiving assistance in transitioning into new livelihoods (Ray et al. 2000). Disagreement on the nature and meaning of the treaties continues today, and has significant practical implications for reconciliation. For example, Indigenous Elders in the Saskatchewan treaties assert that under the terms of the treaties, settlers only obtained rights to agricultural land, to the depth of a plough furrow. This view would suggest that the treaty excluded subsurface minerals, trees, and other non-agricultural land and resources (Cardinal and Hildebrandt 2000; Jobin 2014), which is contrary to the view held by federal and provincial governments today.

Furthermore, many provisions of the treaties were and continue to be broken by settler governments. For example, through a variety of policies, reserve lands have been gradually stripped away; the RCAP (1996c) found that “the actual reserve or community land base of Aboriginal people has shrunk by almost two-thirds since Confederation” (Ch. 4). The RCAP (1996b) also described how many Indigenous communities were relocated from their reserves without their consent to make government administration easier or because their land was desired for economic purposes. The Canadian “specific claims” process deals with situations where the government has allegedly breached its treaty obligations or mishandled First Nations land or other assets. In 2008, a backlog of over 800 unsettled claims spurred the government to launch a new specific claims process. However, the Auditor General (2016) identified a number of serious problems with this process, and hundreds of claims still remain outstanding.

Throughout Canada, Indigenous communities’ livelihood activities on their traditional lands quickly began to be displaced by settler economic activities (Spry 1983); this continues today. For example, Blueberry First Nation, a signatory to Treaty 8, recently filed a civil claim against the province of British Columbia stating that industrial activities prevent its members from carrying on their traditional livelihoods; a study found that 73% of its traditional territory is within 250 metres of an industrial disturbance (E. Macdonald 2016). In northern Alberta, a major oilsands project was approved despite a government review finding that the project, in combination with other oilsands projects in the region, would have significant adverse effects on Aboriginal traditional land use, rights, and culture (Alberta Energy Regulator and Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency 2013). In Saskatchewan, ranchers have used grazing leases to exclude members of Witchehan Lake First Nation from their traditional trapping areas (McLeod 2003). In northwestern Ontario, non-Indigenous people have been granted licences to harvest wild rice planted by the Wabigoon Lake Ojibway Nation (Chapeskie 2002).

At the time of signing of several of the later treaties, it was already clear that, due to the decline of many important species, Indigenous peoples would no longer be able to sustain themselves through traditional practices of hunting and fishing. In response, Indigenous peoples sought to adapt to changing

circumstances by pursuing alternative economic activities. However, colonial policies and practices put up many barriers to doing this. For example, Carter (1993) documents how government policies in the late 1800s and early 1900s hindered Indigenous efforts to take up agriculture. These impediments included failures to provide farming equipment and livestock as specified in the treaties, bans on the use of labour-saving technology through a “peasant agriculture” policy, requirements that Indigenous farmers to acquire permits to sell their goods, and removals of agricultural land from reserves. As a result, promising efforts to begin agriculture on many reserves largely faded out in by the early 1900s. A pass system implemented on the prairies in 1885, which violated treaty rights by requiring Indigenous peoples to obtain a pass from the local Indian agent to leave their reserve (Barron 1988), was a further impediment to agriculture as well as other economic activities.

Large tracts of land in British Columbia, Quebec, the Atlantic Provinces, and the North were never ceded through treaties. As settlers and their governments consider this land “Crown land” based on the Doctrine of Discovery, this has not stopped them from occupying the land and exploiting its resources through forestry, fishing, mining, and agriculture. Provincial and federal governments allow and even facilitate these activities while land claims are under dispute. For example, over 70% of the traditional land of the Lubicon Cree Nation in Alberta has been leased for resource development, despite the fact that the Lubicon never signed a treaty and are engaged in an ongoing land claim. This practice may begin to change; in 2014, the Supreme Court ruled that the Tsilhqot’in Nation has title to a significant portion of their unceded traditional lands and that this title includes the right to decide how the land is used and the right to the economic benefits of the land. It remains to be seen how the effects of this decision will play out in other land claims and future resource management decisions.

Canada’s present-day economy, therefore, rests on colonial foundations. The current settler government’s legal and moral right to unilaterally make policy decisions regarding land and resources is contested, and economics courses which fail to acknowledge this fact are not neutral. Courses that discuss concepts such as natural resources, private property, wealth, and economic development without acknowledging this context, as well as the ways in which Indigenous people may understand these concepts differently, are also not neutral (Arruda 2016). Instead, they perpetuate the ongoing injustices of the colonial system and reinforce barriers to acceptance of the economic changes that will be necessary to achieve reconciliation. For example, emphasizing the importance of private property for market functioning without acknowledging the contested foundations of property rights in Canada is likely to increase students’ resistance to change.

As one small example of how to incorporate these issues into an economics course, as an ecological economist, I already began my Principles course with the “contextual model” of the economy (Goodwin et al. 2014), which situates the economy within its social and ecological contexts. Since I teach in Treaty Six territory, I now add a third context, the “Treaty context.” This opens up space to discuss the history of the Indigenous-non-Indigenous relationship in my particular location, the Treaty obligations which come along with living in this place, and their implications for concrete economic decisions and policies. Later in the course, when I discuss economic development, I spend some time on the economic history of our area – starting with the Indigenous peoples who were here first – and show how factors that improved the economic status of the settlers often excluded and even harmed Indigenous peoples. I emphasize that these issues are not only in the past but continue to occur in the present, and encourage students to consider what this might imply in terms of our contemporary responsibilities.

### *3.3 Poverty, inequality and economic development*

This colonial history and its ongoing implications lie at the root of the socio-economic challenges faced by many Indigenous peoples in Canada today (Make First Nations Poverty History Expert Advisory Committee 2009). Manuel and Derrickson (2015) place the blame for these challenges squarely on the fact that Indigenous reserves make up only 0.2% of Canada's landmass. Many reserves are small, located on marginal land, and distant from transportation networks (Canada. Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. 1996c). On-reserve businesses face difficulties getting access to financial capital, since reserve land and buildings generally cannot be used as collateral (Wuttunee 2010). A 2013 report found that the Indian Act and other government policies create many barriers to economic development on reserves: difficulties with obtaining funding; delays in government processes for permits, land designations and other approvals; barriers to adding land to reserves, such as the requirement that the new land be contiguous with the existing reserve; and complex procedures for environmental approvals (National Aboriginal Economic Development Board 2013).

Human capital is also a significant concern, both on and off reserve. As of 2016, 28% of Indigenous people over age 20 in Canada, and 46% of those living on reserve, did not have a high school diploma, compared with only 14% of non-Indigenous Canadians (Statistics Canada 2016a). At least part of this disparity can likely be attributed to the fact that First Nations schools face a significant funding gap compared to provincially-run schools (Drummond and Rosenbluth 2013) and a range of systemic deficits including poor facilities, lack of early childhood education, poor support for special needs, limited curricula, and more (National Panel on First Nation Elementary and Secondary Education for Students on Reserve 2012). Furthermore, Indigenous children in Canada face major health disparities compared to non-Indigenous children (UNICEF 2009).

As a result of these and other factors, poverty rates among Indigenous peoples in Canada are high: 60% of First Nations children living on reserve and 31% of Indigenous children off reserve are poor, compared with 17% among non-Indigenous children (D. Macdonald and Wilson 2016). Using Statistics Canada's Low Income Measure, 23.6% of Indigenous people were classified as low income, compared with 13.8% of non-Indigenous people (Statistics Canada 2016b). Another indication of poverty is that 19% of Indigenous people, including 44% of those living on reserves, live in homes that require major repairs, compared with only 6% of non-Indigenous Canadians (Statistics Canada 2016c). Furthermore, unemployment rates as of 2016 were 15.2% for Indigenous people, including 24.8% for Indigenous people on reserve, compared to 7.4% for non-Indigenous people (Statistics Canada 2016d).

Thus, courses which discuss poverty and inequality in a global context must also pay attention to the poverty and inequality that exist within settler-colonial states as a result of colonialism. A failure to acknowledge the structural barriers which perpetuate poverty in Indigenous communities leaves students with the impression that Indigenous people are responsible for their own problems (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015), thus fostering racism while leaving students unprepared to play a role in correcting these injustices.

To the best of my knowledge, none of the Canadian Principles texts – most of which are adapted from American texts – address any of these issues. I have also been unable to locate any supplementary resources directed to the economics classroom, nor any accounts of economics educators who are taking the initiative to go beyond the text and teach their students this material. I hope such educators

do exist. However, it seems likely that the vast majority of Canadian economics students are not being adequately prepared to understand the reasons for the economic struggles of Indigenous peoples in Canada, nor the need for economic changes to address these issues.

#### **4 Where do we start?**

It is clear from the foregoing that reconciliation will require significant economic changes in Canada. Central to these will be a redistribution of land, resources, and decision-making power (Alfred 2005; Canada. Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. 1996c; King 2015; Manuel and Derrickson 2015). In 2016, Canada adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), which has a number of significant economic implications including rights to the use and control of traditional territories, redress for dispossession from land and resources, self-determination, economic development, environmental protection, and free and informed consent to decisions affecting land and resources (United Nations General Assembly 2007). It remains to be seen how the Declaration will be practically implemented in Canada. However, these realities support the argument that education about these issues cannot be left solely to history or Indigenous studies courses. Students must be helped to understand that the present economic system in Canada is built on a colonial foundation which continues to treat Indigenous people unjustly, and that continuing with “business as usual” is not acceptable. They must be equipped to understand the need for new institutions, policies and practices – real changes in the way the Canadian economy works.

Furthermore, no matter how drastic these changes might be, Indigenous and non-Indigenous people will continue to co-exist in Canada. Doing so respectfully and in a way that honours the needs and rights of both parties requires that non-Indigenous Canadians understand that not everyone thinks about the world in the way that they do, and that they are open to different approaches to economic practices and decisions. Education that treats Indigenous perspectives with equal respect would contribute to developing these attitudes.

A key beginning step, then is to acknowledge that economics, as a discipline, exemplifies cognitive imperialism (Battiste 2013) or epistemic ignorance (Kuokkanen 2007). The history of economic thought, at least as it is taught in today’s economics classrooms, is a history of white, European and North American thought. Mainstream economics texts make no mention of non-Western or Indigenous thought (Arruda 2016); I am not aware of any non-standard texts that offer any substantive treatment of such ideas either (an interesting exception, though probably not usable as a stand-alone textbook, is Lessem and Schieffer (2010)). While heterodox schools of thought have introduced some diversity into the discipline, and the movement towards pluralism has opened up more space for discussion of, for example, Islamic and Buddhist economics, most heterodox schools are still rooted in Western paradigms and methodologies (Zein-Elabdin 2004). In fact, Zein-Elabdin claims that among all the disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, “Economics, alone, remains largely unaware of post-colonial contributions” (2004, p. 21).

This exclusion of non-Western perspectives has a number of implications. It is fundamentally disrespectful to Indigenous and other peoples, and fosters false – if often unconscious – assumptions of racial and cultural superiority among both students and teachers. It impoverishes the discipline by automatically excluding insights from alternative perspectives. It also leaves students unprepared to

participate in the development of new economic institutions and practices that can support the respectful co-existence of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

It is essential to recognize at the outset that educating for reconciliation must happen in the context of respectful relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Non-Indigenous educators cannot do this work on their own, in part because they do not have the knowledge, language or skills to serve as experts on Indigenous perspectives. But they also cannot expect Indigenous scholars – who are relatively few in number and already overburdened – to do all the work for them, especially when there are abundant opportunities for self-education. Thus, the first step is to listen and learn from Indigenous voices: “The answer to the question, ‘What can I/we do?’ then, is first to actively hear what is being said, to make sense of it, and to try to see whether and how it relates to one’s own subjectivity and practice” (Kuokkanen 2007, p. 142). In my own journey of understanding these issues, the two works I have found especially helpful are those frequently cited in this paper, Kuokkanen (2007) and Battiste (2013).

Kuokkanen (2007) also emphasizes the importance of getting to know one’s own home, and learning from the people who were at home here long before we were. For Canadians, Métis scholar Olive Dickason’s widely respected history textbook, *Canada’s First Nations: A History of Founding Peoples from Earliest Times* (2009) is essential reading. The reports of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996b) and the TRC (2015) also provide vital information about the history of the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada. Educators should also seek out more specific local histories that are available for particular provinces, treaties, and aspects of colonialism.

The diversity of Indigenous peoples and the relationship between Indigenous knowledge and place mean it is also essential to remain mindful of the local context when seeking out Indigenous perspectives on economic life, though reading more broadly is helpful too. For example, as an educator in central Alberta, Treaty Six territory, I have focused on work by local Cree (Jobin 2014; Makokis 2010) and Métis (Ghostkeeper 2007) scholars. However, this does not mean excluding work by others, such as Anishinaabe (LaDuke 2013; Olsen Dannenmann 2009), Kanien'kehaka (Alfred 2005), and Sami (Kuokkanen 2007, 2011) scholars, as well as perspectives from other parts of the world (Dillon 2014). Developing relationships with local Indigenous scholars, Elders, Knowledge Keepers and communities is important too, though we should not depend on them to educate us about ideas we could easily learn through a bit of research. It is also essential to follow local protocols, such as offering an appropriate gift when asking for help from Elders.

From learning comes action. As we learn from Indigenous voices and about colonial realities, as educators we must create space for our students to learn these ideas as well. Shauneen Pete (2016) offers a number of practical suggestions for how to do this. The previous section made some suggestions specific to economics courses. In addition, educating for reconciliation within a particular course or department should not be seen in isolation from the broader responsibilities of the academy. Institutional changes such as shifting decision-making power, recruiting Indigenous faculty, staff, and students, making physical spaces more welcoming and inclusive, and connecting with local Indigenous communities are also necessary. Again, Pete (2016) provides a list of helpful suggestions.

## **5 Conclusion**

By virtue of living and teaching on shared land, educators in Canada and other settler-colonial states have a responsibility to consider how their work affects the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. The choice to teach our students – or not – about Indigenous rights, history, culture and perspectives is not a neutral decision; our actions shape the ways in which our students will interact with these issues in the future. This paper has sought to show that economists are not exempt from these responsibilities. Colonialism has real economic implications in the present; Indigenous perspectives and their current exclusion from the economics curriculum have real implications for the Indigenous-settler relationship. These are not issues we can ignore or wait for someone else to address. We must listen, learn, acknowledge our complicity in current injustices, and take responsibility for our own need to change.

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<sup>i</sup> It is important to note that there is not one single Indigenous perspective; instead, there are multiple perspectives from multiple Indigenous nations and groups. However, there are some themes that are common to many Indigenous peoples.