**Erasing Borders Through Academic Activism:**

**Truth and Reconciliation in Canada**

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**Purpose:** The purpose of this paper is to acknowledge the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Report (2015) on the Indian Residential Schools (IRS) and to respond to their recommendations and call for action, particularly in respect to the post-secondary education sector as a way of moving forward for all Canadians. We situate this paper in the context of Canada’s upcoming 150 anniversary on July 1, 2017. Specifically, we focus on the action taken by Laurentian University, its Faculty of Management and Department of Marketing and Management as well as individual professors in responding to the TRC’s recommendations and call for action for institutions of post-secondary education.

**Methodology:** This is an empirical paper focusing on one post-secondary organization, Laurentian University, its faculty of Management and Department of Marketing and Management as a case study.

**Findings:** We have found that Laurentian University has taken specific steps at the organizational, departmental and individual levels in making great efforts for improving the diversity and inclusion climate for Indigenous peoples and the decolonizing of academia in response to the TRC recommendations.

**Implications:** This paper has implications for other organizations in Canada and around the world in providing examples of substantial steps that can be taken for improving the diversity and inclusion climate at all levels of an organization.

**Limitations:** The major limitation isthe non-generalizability of the results as it is a specific case study of one Canadian university. Other institutions may take different approaches and be facing different diversity contexts.

**Originality/Contributions:** This isan original contribution as it provides specific examples of substantial steps that were taken for improving the diversity and inclusion climate at all levels of a Canadian post-secondary organization in response to the TRC recommendations.

**Abstract:** The purpose of this paper is to acknowledge the Truth and Reconciliation Report (2015) on the Indian Residential Schools (IRS) and to respond to their recommendations and call for action, particularly in respect to post- secondary education sector as a way of moving forward for all Canadians. This paper situates this in the context of Canada’s upcoming 150 anniversary on July 1, 2017. Specifically, we focus on the action taken by Laurentian University, its Faculty of Management and Department of Marketing and Management as well as individual professors. This is an empirical paper focusing on one organization and department as a case study. We have found that Laurentian University has taken specific steps in making great efforts for improving the diversity and inclusion climate for Indigenous peoples and for the decolonizing of academia. A limitation isthe non-generalizability of the results as it is a specific case study. Other institutions may take different approaches and be facing different diversity contexts.

**KEYWORDS:** Canada, Indigenous Peoples, Aboriginal, Indian Residential Schools, Truth and Reconciliation,Diversity and Inclusion Climate**,** Laurentian University.

**“When a flower doesn’t bloom, you fix the environment in which it grows, not the flower!”**

**Alexander den Heijer**

**Introduction**

When we think of borders, we are very likely to automatically think of them in terms of global or national country borders and people who cross these borders for various reasons to visit or settle in foreign countries as guests or immigrants and the consequent challenges presented in crossing borders, especially in these times of increasing restrictions and scrutiny in international travel. However, once within a country, the organisations in which we all work also provide a very rich context for the study of borders or boundaries in regards to macro, meso and micro levels of challenges faced for ensuring equality, diversity and inclusion within our workplaces*.*

This year, on July 1, 2017, Canada will be celebrating its 150 year anniversary with much joy, pomp and show. Undoubtedly, in these 150 years, Canada has gained a highly respected international reputation as a multicultural country welcoming, respectful and embracing all immigrants into its citizenship as a unique approach to nation-building. In fact, Canada has documented a long journey of celebrating its unique English and French heritage by protecting both these official languages, cultures and histories. Unfortunately, in its quest for self-preservation, it has forgotten its original Native peoples, Indigenous peoples or the Aboriginal peoples, as these terms are used interchangeably, who were already living here as many distinct nations each with their own culture, language and traditional practices. “Native”, “Aboriginal” and “Indigenous” are umbrella terms used in Canada which include the status and non-status First Nations, Metis and Inuit peoples.

The term “Indian” was actually a mistake since Christopher Columbus had originally set out for India and accidentally reached North America! Therefore, First Nations peoples in Canada were called ‘Indians’ by the colonial Europeans, a term which is legally still in use. The Indian Act (1876) gave the Canadian government total control over the lives of the Indian peoples and required Indian children to attend residential schools. “Residential schools were originally created by Christian churches and the Canadian government. The goals of these schools were to ‘civilize’ Indigenous peoples by forcibly converting them to Christianity, and to integrate them into Canadian society through the process of cultural, social, educational, economic and political assimilation. Residential schools were underfunded and overcrowded; they were rife with starvation, neglect, and physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, often including isolation from normal human contact and nurturing. Students were forcibly removed from their communities, homes and parents, and frequently forbidden to speak their indigenous language and perform traditional music and dance.” (Educational Guide)

According to the TRC, approximately 150,000 First Nations, Inuit and Metis children attended Indian residential schools (IRS). An estimated 6,000 children died while in the residential school system, and many more remain unaccounted for. The legacy of the schools has been to alienate generations of Indigenous peoples from their beliefs, traditions and lifestyles. The damages inflicted by these schools created intergenerational trauma that continues to affect Indigenous peoples across Canada today. Although the IRS were all closed, today nine of the 136 residential school buildings are still in place. In June 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission designated the residential school system a “policy of cultural genocide.” (Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future, 134.)

*“Canada’ residential school system for Aboriginal children was an education system in name only for much of its existence. These residential schools were created for the purpose of separating Aboriginal children from their families, in order to minimize and weaken family ties and cultural linkages, and to indoctrinate children into a new culture-the culture of the legally dominant Euro-Christian Canadian society, led by Canada’s first prime minister, Sir John A. Macdonald. The schools were in existence for well over 100 years, and many successive generations of children from the same communities and families endured the experience of them. That experience was hidden for most of Canada’s history, until Survivors of the system were finally able to find the strength, courage, and support to bring their experiences to light in several thousand court cases that ultimately led to the largest class-action lawsuit in Canadian history.” (TRC Final Report, Vol 1. Preface, 2015)*

**Climate for Diversity and Inclusion At the Country Level:**

During the 1980s and 1990s, Survivors of the IRS started to speak out about the abuses they had experienced in the residential schools and, by 2001, an estimated 78,500 people had gone to court or were preparing to sue the Government of Canada and the churches involved for damages and compensation in class action suits. Faced with a deluge of lengthy court battles, the Government of Canada and the churches entered into a negotiated settlement with the Indian residential school Survivors, resulting in the 2005 Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement which was ratified in provincial courts in 2006 and implemented in 2007. On June 11, 2006, Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper and the leaders of all the federal political parties formally apologized in the House of Commons for the harms caused by the Indian Residential School System (IRSS). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada was created by the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement to settle the class actions (Educational Guide).

In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) released its final report with 94 recommendations to help Canadians and Indigenous peoples move towards reconciliation. It specifically made a Call for Action in “Education” in recommendations #6 to 12 (See Appendix A); a Call for Action in “Education for Reconciliation” in recommendations # 62 to 65 (See Appendix B) challenging all Canadian schools, colleges and universities to become active participants in the reconciliation process; and a Call for Action in “Business and Reconciliation” in recommendation # 92 (See Appendix C) for the business and corporate sector in Canada.

The Executive Summary of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada states: *“Schools must teach history in ways that foster mutual respect, empathy, and engagement. All Canadian children and youth deserve to know Canada’s honest history, including what happened in the residential schools, and to appreciate the rich history and knowledge of Indigenous nations who continue to make such a strong contribution to Canada, including our very name and collective identity as a country. For Canadians from all walks of life, reconciliation offers a new way of living together”* (Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future, 2015, Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada).

**Climate for Diversity and Inclusion At the Organizational Level:**

Canada has always been a diverse nation but not always an inclusive one. “Although diversity and inclusion are sometimes used interchangeably, they are separate and distinct constructs. Diversity refers to demographic differences among members, including both observable (e.g., gender, race, age) and non-observable (e.g., culture, cognition, education) attributes, and is considered a characteristic of a workgroup or organization (Nishii, 2013; Roberson, 2005). Inclusion, in contrast, refers to employee perceptions that their unique contributions to the organization is appreciated and their full participation is encouraged” (Mor Barak, 2015:85).

At the organizational level, “Inclusion in multicultural organizations means that there is equality, justice, and full participation at both the group and individual levels so that members of different groups not only have equal access to opportunities, decision making, and positions of power, but they are actively sought out *because* [original italics] of their differences. In a multicultural, inclusive organization, differences of all types become integrated into the fabric of the business, such that they become a necessary part of doing its everyday work.” (Holvino, Ferdman and Merill-Sands, 2004:248).

In an inclusive organization, “the diversity of knowledge and perspectives that members of different groups bring .. has shaped its strategy, it’s work, its management and operating systems, and its core values and norms for success…members of all groups are treated fairly , feel included and actually are included, have equal opportunities, and are represented at all organizational levels and functions.” Diversity is woven “into the fabric of the organization”. (Holvino, Ferdman and Merill-Sands, 2004:249).

Laurentian University, located on the traditional territory of Atikameksheng Anishnawbek First Nation in the city of Sudbury in the province of Ontario in Canada, is the only university in this province with a unique bilingual (English and French) and tri-cultural (English, French and Aboriginal) mandate. Laurentian has a School of Indigenous Relations and appointed an Associate Vice-President for Academic and Indigenous Programs, developed a Masters of Indigenous Relations program which is the first of its kind in Canada, established the Maamwizing Research Institute and is opening its new Indigenous Sharing and Learning Center (ISLC) on the Canadian National Aboriginal Day June 21, 2017. See image.

In November 2016, it organized Maamwizing Indigenizing the Academy conference, including an indigenous francophone preconference, with over 300 national and international participants “to engage in critical reflection and analysis of the barriers and challenges encountered, as well as the achievements and progress made in promoting Indigeneity in the academy…to share best practices and to reflect on ways to move forward as we take up the challenges of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report within our respective institutions.” Workshops and seminars have been organized on special topics specifically focusing on First Nations. Scholarships have also been setup to help First Nations youth attend college and university.

*“Dr. Cote-Meek has been the Associate Vice-President, Academic and Indigenous Programs since 2010.  During her tenure in this position she has led Indigenous strategic initiatives including development of the recently completed Indigenous Sharing and Learning Centre, academic programming, overseeing Indigenous student support services and assisting with building Indigenous teaching and research capacity. She has strengthened relationships between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities as well as bridged the gap between academia and student supports. Her work has resulted in an increased awareness and attention to Indigenous peoples and the unique needs of Indigenous learners.” (Laurentian Website).*

Laurentian University is currently in the process of developing its new Strategic Plan for 2018-2023 through extensive consultation with all the stakeholders, including the indigenous community which is a priority area given Laurentian’s tri-cultural mandate.

**Climate for Diversity and Inclusion At the Faculty and Department Level:**

The Faculty of Management (FOM) of Laurentian University recently received its EPAS accreditation and is currently in the process of its Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) accreditation. EPAS is an international program accreditation system operated by the EFMD to evaluate the quality of business management programs with an international perspective (EFMD Website) and AACSB is a business management accreditation service, since 1916, with currently 1,500 member organizations and 785 accredited business schools worldwide (AACSB Website). In both these situations, FOM has firmly documented its commitment to Canada’s Indigenous heritage and community. Consequently, all courses are now required to monitor and document their Indigenous course content and activities. It may follow the Faculty of Arts which has recently introduced a requirement for all students to take at least one three credit course with Indigenous content as a condition for graduation with a four year undergraduate degree.

On January 15th, 2016 the members of the Marketing and Management Department attended a First Nations Business Workshop where they were made aware that a minimal and critical gesture of Reconciliation between the First Nations and other Canadians would be to acknowledge Aboriginal territory as a form of respect before beginning meetings and classes. Therefore, in 2016, the Department of Marketing and Management passed a motion adopting a Statement of Acknowledgement of the Traditional Territory – Déclaration de Reconnaissance du Territoire Ancestral to be used at the beginning of department meetings and first day of term classes and encouraged other departments within the Faculty of Management as well as other Faculties at Laurentian University to do the same:

*“We acknowledge we are gathered on the traditional territory of the Atikameksheng Anishnaabek and acknowledge their stewardship of this land throughout the ages.”*

*“Nous reconnaissons que nous sommes réunis sur le territoire ancestral des Atikameksheng Anishnaabek qui ont pris soin de cette terre depuis la nuit des temps.” (Department of Marketing and Management, Meeting Minutes, January 2016).*

Not all the faculty members were in favour of this move and felt that there were other much more effective means to support the Aboriginal cause for those who wanted to take on an activist or advocacy role. However, the majority of the Marketing and Management Department members were in agreement that such a gesture will be perceived as a beginning towards establishing a welcoming climate to embrace the importance of Indigenous peoples in the local, national and international community inviting them into our department as students, as faculty members, as well as participants in our professional activities.

**Climate for Diversity and Inclusion At the Individual Level:**

At the individual level, Ferdman, Barrera, et al. (2009:6) “define the *experience of inclusion* [original italics] in a workgroup as individuals’ perception of the extent to which they feel safe, trusted, accepted, respected, supported, valued, fulfilled, engaged, and authentic in their working environment, both as individuals and as members of particular identity groups.” Ferdman (2010:37) further goes on to elaborate that “Inclusion involves both being fully ourselves and allowing others to be fully themselves in the context of engaging in common pursuits. It means collaborating in a way in which all parties can be fully engaged and subsumed, and yet, paradoxically, at the same time believe that they have not compromised, hidden, or given up any part of themselves. Thus, for individuals, experiencing inclusion involves being fully part of the whole while retaining a sense of authenticity and uniqueness.”

Some professors have taken individual measures to varying degrees, such as, adding Aboriginal content, history and culture within the core course material; integrating Aboriginal content into certain classes; inviting Aboriginal guest speakers. As I embark upon my pursuit of honouring the truth and reconciliation in my classroom I am interested in learning more not only about Canadian but also the world’s Indigenous languages, culture and histories in order to bring them into my students’ awareness and interest.

Last Fall, in September 2016, I started my MBA course on Global Management with our department’s adopted Statement of Acknowledgement of the Traditional Territory to be used at the beginning of department meetings and first day of term classes: *“We acknowledge we are gathered on the traditional territory of the Atikameksheng Anishnaabek and acknowledge their stewardship of this land throughout the ages*.” I was not at all surprised that the students were taken by surprise and admitted that they were not aware of it and had heard this for the very first time. Unfortunately, I was also not at all surprised at the push back from some students regarding historical discrimination which they think is no longer valid in today’s world.

Therefore, I have incorporated an Indigenous component to the research based group term assignment on the impact of globalization on business practices and management, required for this course, encouraging students to learn more about Indigenous issues in Canada and around the world. I will also be inviting Indigenous elders, experts, entrepreneurs and business professionals into my classroom to share their experiences and insights as I aim to enhance critical thinking and engagement in all my courses. I am also mindful of the TRC recommendations on pursuing reconciliatory education. Some of the guiding principles will be to increase knowledge, respect, recognition, and critical thinking about Indigenous-Colonial relations including embedded assumptions in society and education. Bringing Indigenous perspectives, valuing Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing, and teaching Indigenous knowledge with due respect to Indigenous elders.

Education is a fundamental human right. The Indian Residential School (IRS) system not only failed the Aboriginal children but also their parents, families, extended families and entire communities through multigenerational trauma and cultural genocide. According to Census 2011, only 8.7% of First Nations people, 5.1% of Inuit, and 11.7% of Metis have a university degree (TRC, 2015:151) and many of the ninety surviving Aboriginal languages are close to extinction (TRC, 2015:154). The IRS education system undeniably failed and now the education system must set it right by honouring the reconciliation process.

Keh-na-da means “the land where we live together”. What an appropriate name for a country that is constantly striving to be welcoming and inclusive of everyone. Happy Birthday Canada!

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**APPENDIX A**

**Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action**

**Education**

6. We call upon the Government of Canada to repeal Section 43 of the Criminal Code of Canada.

7. We call upon the federal government to develop with Aboriginal groups a joint strategy to eliminate educational and employment gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians.

8. We call upon the federal government to eliminate the discrepancy in federal education funding for First Nations children being educated on reserves and those First Nations children being educated off reserves.

9. We call upon the federal government to prepare and publish annual reports comparing funding for the education of First Nations children on and off reserves, as well as educational and income attainments of Aboriginal peoples in Canada compared with non Aboriginal people.

10. We call on the federal government to draft new Aboriginal education legislation with the full participation and informed consent of Aboriginal peoples. The new legislation would include a commitment to sufficient funding and would incorporate the following principles:

i. Providing sufficient funding to close identified educational achievement gaps within one generation.

ii. Improving education attainment levels and success rates.

iii. Developing culturally appropriate curricula.

iv. Protecting the right to Aboriginal languages, including the teaching of Aboriginal languages as credit courses.

v. Enabling parental and community responsibility, control, and accountability, similar to what parents enjoy in public school systems.

vi. Enabling parents to fully participate in the education of their children.

vii. Respecting and honouring Treaty relationships.

11. We call upon the federal government to provide adequate funding to end the backlog of First Nations students seeking a post-secondary education.

12. We call upon the federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments to develop culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Aboriginal families.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015). <http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf>

**APPENDIX B**

**Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action**

**Education for reconciliation**

62. We call upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, in consultation and collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal peoples, and educators, to:

i. Make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples’ historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve students.

ii. Provide the necessary funding to post-secondary institutions to educate teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms.

iii. Provide the necessary funding to Aboriginal schools to utilize Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods in classrooms.

iv. Establish senior-level positions in government at the assistant deputy minister level or higher dedicated to Aboriginal content in education.

63. We call upon the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada to maintain an annual commitment to Aboriginal education issues, including:

i. Developing and implementing Kindergarten to Grade Twelve curriculum and learning resources on Aboriginal peoples in Canadian history, and the history and legacy of residential schools.

ii. Sharing information and best practices on teaching curriculum related to residential schools and Aboriginal history.

iii. Building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect.

iv. Identifying teacher-training needs relating to the above.

64. We call upon all levels of government that provide public funds to denominational schools to require such schools to provide an education on comparative religious studies, which must include a segment on Aboriginal spiritual beliefs and practices developed in collaboration with Aboriginal Elders.

65. We call upon the federal government, through the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, and in collaboration with Aboriginal peoples, post-secondary institutions and educators, and the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation and its partner institutions, to establish a national research program with multi-year funding to advance understanding of reconciliation.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015). <http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf>

**APPENDIX C**

**Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action**

**Business and Reconciliation**

92. We call upon the corporate sector in Canada to adopt the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a reconciliation framework and to apply its principles, norms, and standards to corporate policy and core operational activities involving Indigenous peoples and their lands and resources. This would include, but not be limited to, the following:

i. Commit to meaningful consultation, building respectful relationships, and obtaining the free, prior, and informed consent of Indigenous peoples before proceeding with economic development projects.

ii. Ensure that Aboriginal peoples have equitable access to jobs, training, and education opportunities in the corporate sector, and that Aboriginal communities gain long-term sustainable benefits from economic development projects.

iii. Provide education for management and staff on the history of Aboriginal peoples, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties and Aboriginal rights, Indigenous law, and Aboriginal–Crown relations. This will require skills based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015). <http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf>

